

News from Around the Complex

November 2007

November 30, 2007

DOE set to unveil plan: Proposal to modernize nuclear weapons plants,
Amarillo Globe-News

The U.S. Department of Energy will unveil its proposed plan for a smaller, more efficient nuclear weapons complex early next month, a top National Nuclear Administration official said Thursday. The department is now preparing to roll out its long-awaited proposal to modernize nuclear weapons plants and laboratories, NNSA Administrator Tom D'Agostino said during a tour of Pantex. Pantex is one of five sites vying for a new center that would conduct plutonium research and manufacture about 125 plutonium triggers for nuclear warheads each year. Although the DOE has not formally announced its preferred site for the new plutonium production and research center, that facility is expected to be located at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. Pantex, however, will take on an expanded role dismantling nuclear warheads. "We expect the preferred alternative to be announced shortly in the month of December," D'Agostino said. "When we do that, we are going to describe the type of workload, the type of improvements we think we need to see in the complex that will sustain the complex at a reasonable size, at the right type of modernization level over the many years to come."

http://www.amarillo.com/stories/113007/new_9071661.shtml

November 28, 2007

DOE seeks changes in WIPP permit, *Carlsbad Current-Argus*

CARLSBAD — The Department of Energy's Carlsbad Field Office wants to increase the scope of gases it monitors in its underground panels at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. The DOE recently issued a set of proposed modifications to its hazardous waste permit for the WIPP site near Carlsbad. The state permit was first issued by the New Mexico Environment Department in 1999. The proposed modification, according to a news release, would allow the department to monitor for hydrogen and methane in underground panels used for the storage of transuranic waste until final panel closure. The class 2 proposed permit modification was issued Nov. 21. Class 2 is the middle level of proposed permit modifications. Rarer and more significant are Class 3 modifications, such as last year's state authorization for WIPP to dispose of remote handled waste. The state's jurisdiction over WIPP is related to chemical issues.

http://www.currentargus.com/ci_7584652

November 26, 2007

WIPP fined almost \$1 million by state, *Carlsbad Current-Argus*

CARLSBAD — Fines totaling nearly \$1 million have been levied against the U.S. Department of Energy Carlsbad Field Office for violations of its permit at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant located 27 miles east of Carlsbad, the N.M. Environment Department announced Monday. WIPP officials had little immediate comment on the action, saying they would respond after a complete review of all documentation. The enforcement actions, which included two administrative compliance orders and one notice of violation, totaled \$996,220, according to a NMED press release. The first administrative compliance order concerned a violation that occurred in June of this year when the department accepted a drum containing liquid waste from Idaho National Laboratory for storage and disposal at WIPP.

http://www.currentargus.com/ci_7566171

November 25, 2007

Nuclear material prepared for move, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

OAK RIDGE - In preparation for the move into a new \$549 million, high-security storage facility, workers at the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant are packaging tons of highly enriched uranium into new storage containers. Once the bomb-grade material has been measured, weighed, certified and carefully loaded into the new "rackable can storage boxes," the boxes can be moved directly into the Highly Enriched Uranium Materials Facility without having to go through another round of time-consuming and costly evaluations. "We never have to touch them again until they go to HEUMF," said Paul Hight, a production manager with BWXT Y-12, the government's contractor at Y-12. Construction of the fortress-like storage complex is 65 percent complete and should be wrapped up sometime next year if the schedule holds.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/nov/26/nuclear-material-prepared-move/>

November 25, 2007

Cleanup at INL safely ahead of schedule, *Bonner County Daily Bee*

Every week, large 18-wheelers leave the Idaho National Laboratory in eastern Idaho carrying canisters of transuranic waste headed for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, known as WIPP. The facility is located in the Chihuahuan Desert outside Carlsbad, N.M. Transuranic waste is defined as waste containing more than 100 nanocuries of alpha-emitting transuranic isotopes per gram of waste. This waste contains no spent fuel or high-level wastes. It is mainly the byproduct of nuclear weapon research and development. It includes such things as protective clothing, tools, glassware, soils and sludge. Since October, the U.S. Department of Energy has shipped over 19,000 cubic meters of this highly contaminated, low-level waste out of Idaho and into the New Mexico depository. This movement of low-level wastes is a major part of the cleanup project being carried out by DOE in the 890-square-mile area known as the Idaho National Laboratory.

<http://www.bonnercountydailybee.com/articles/2007/11/25/editorials/edit02.txt>

November 21, 2007

Accord reached over Hanford fine, *The Seattle Times*

YAKIMA — The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) reached an agreement with its regulators Tuesday to settle a \$1.14 million fine for cleanup failures at the nation's most contaminated nuclear site. The fine was the largest ever levied by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Northwest office over work at the Hanford nuclear reservation in south-central Washington. The penalty concerned operations at a landfill for contaminated soils and other hazardous and radioactive wastes from cleanup operations. The federal government created Hanford in the 1940s as part of the top-secret Manhattan Project to build the atomic bomb. Today, workers labor to rid the 586-square-mile site of waste left from decades of plutonium production for the nation's nuclear-weapons arsenal. The problems came to light in January, when a subcontractor at the site discovered that an employee had been recording data for compaction testing at the landfill, when no testing had been done since June 2005.

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2004026634_hanford21m.html

November 19, 2007

More time, cost for OR cleanup, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

OAK RIDGE - The government's Oak Ridge cleanup effort is going to take longer and cost even more than previously thought. The big project of the future - involving the demolition of more than 200 old buildings at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the

Y-12 nuclear weapons plant - is now expected to begin around 2010, take 15 years to complete and cost somewhere between \$4 billion and \$8 billion. Gerald Boyd, the U.S. Department of Energy's Oak Ridge manager, last week said DOE is trying to work out a contract strategy for the long-range project, known officially as the Integrated Facility Disposition Project. He said the federal agency will invite cleanup companies to participate in an Oak Ridge workshop in late January or early February to help develop a plan.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/nov/19/more-time-cost-for-or-cleanup/>

November 18, 2007

Cost overruns halt cleanup at Mound plant, *Dayton Daily News (Ohio)*

MIAMISBURG — Work has ground to a halt on the final piece of the \$1 billion environmental remediation of the old Mound atomic plant, and a battle is shaping up over whether the job will be completed and who will pay for it. U.S. Rep. Mike Turner, who led efforts in 2005 to earmark \$30 million for the cleanup of radioactive and chemical hazards in an old Mound landfill, said the Energy Department is obliged to pay to finish the job. The Energy Department, which owns the site and doesn't believe the landfill cleanup was ever environmentally necessary, gave \$4.5 million toward the project earlier this fall and plans to walk away from it early next year if local officials don't come up with the estimated \$5 million that's still needed.

<http://www.daytondailynews.com/n/content/oh/story/news/local/2007/11/17/ddn111807mound.html>

November 16, 2007

Bill targets spent uranium: Whitfield proposes extension of gaseous diffusion plant's life, *The Paducah Sun*

A bill filed Thursday by U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield would prolong the life of the 1,100-employee Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant for several years beyond its planned 2012 closure, but it won't be considered until next year. The measure directs the Department of Energy to contract with USEC Inc. to re-enrich spent uranium, called "tails," in about 20,000 cylinders stored at Paducah and a closed sister factory in Piketon, Ohio. "The plant has been the economic engine of the community for many decades, and therefore it is extremely important that the plant remains open as long as possible," said Whitfield, R-Hopkinsville. His legislation would require:

--DOE and USEC to negotiate a contract within 90 days of passage and start reusing the tails within another month. USEC would re-enrich 25 percent during the first phase and the rest starting in June 2012 after ceasing normal operation.

--Proceeds to go into a fund for ongoing cleanup of the Paducah and Piketon plants. The fund, which expired last month, would continue for three years. The tails could be worth \$750 million to \$3 billion after production costs, based on soaring market prices for natural uranium.

<http://www.tradingmarkets.com/.site/news/Stock%20News/836257/>

November 15, 2007

INL, DOE propose waste cleanup plans: State holds off on endorsement, *Times-News (Idaho)*

It was all laid out in posters: The \$1 billion plan to remove buried nuclear waste from Idaho soil. The Idaho National Laboratory and the federal Department of Energy unveiled plans Wednesday night in Twin Falls for the next phase of nuclear waste removal at the INL site in eastern Idaho. But the state is reluctant to endorse the plan, saying it doesn't remove enough waste. The INL and DOE want to cleanup about 4.8 acres of 33,000 cubic meters of nuclear waste, mostly the leftovers from weapons production that was buried underground between about 1950 and 1970.

The state says that's not enough, and is waiting to endorse the plan or an alternative until the resolution of a pending lawsuit that could resolve disputes between the state and the DOE over an earlier waste-removal agreement.

http://www.magicvalley.com/articles/2007/11/15/news/local_state/124739.txt

November 14, 2007

DOE to extend OR cleanup pact, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

OAK RIDGE - The U.S. Department of Energy plans to restructure Bechtel Jacobs Co.'s Oak Ridge cleanup contract and extend it through 2011, a DOE spokesman confirmed Tuesday. Some of the biggest cleanup projects in Oak Ridge have fallen far behind schedule, including the decommissioning of the K-25 uranium-enrichment facility, and that's the primary reason for reworking the contract. DOE and Bechtel Jacobs, the environmental manager since 1998, have been in discussions for months regarding the future work, but DOE had declined to give specifics regarding the contract talks or confirm whether Bechtel Jacobs would continue in its present role.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/nov/14/doe-to-extend-or-cleanup-pact/>

November 12, 2007

New limits at nuclear waste site have Texas scrambling, *The Houston Chronicle*

In 1987, scavengers in the Brazilian city of Goiania broke open an abandoned medical machine to discover an intriguing, seemingly supernatural glowing blue powder. Some residents rubbed it into their skin. The substance was cesium-137, a radioactive cancer-causing isotope that was released in the Soviet Union's 1986 Chernobyl reactor disaster. In Goiania, four people died; hundreds were exposed to radiation. For decades, Texas and 38 other states have shipped materials with small amounts of cesium-137 and other nuclear fission products to a landfill in Barnwell County, S.C. But July 1, the dump will close to all but South Carolina and two other states. That development has left Texas clients scrambling to find ways to manage low-level waste until a proposed disposal site opens in West Texas' Andrews County, possibly in three years. The Barnwell County site, which sprawls across 235 acres on the South Carolina-Georgia border, is one of only two such facilities in the nation that accept the nastier low-level offscourings of the atomic industry.

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/5293307.html>

November 9, 2007

Radioactive waste treatment plan goes back to drawing board, *Tri-City Herald Online*

The Department of Energy is rethinking its plan for treating radioactive sludge now held in the K West Basin after reviews by independent experts raised issues. The design of the treatment system had been considered complete, but now DOE is returning to the conceptual phase of the design. Until DOE is confident of the technology to be used for sludge treatment, it is not estimating when treatment of the sludge will start. But it's certain that DOE will miss the legally binding Tri-Party Agreement deadline of March 31, 2009, to have all the sludge out of the K West Basin and the K West and K East Basins demolished. "We're frustrated with the length of time not just for the sludge removal but also treatment," Nick Ceto, Hanford program manager for the Environmental Protection Agency, told the Hanford Advisory Board at its meeting last week. EPA is the regulator for the K Basins.

<http://www.hanfordnews.com/news/2007/story/9442264p-9353818c.html>

November 7, 2007

DOE wants to stretch nuke reactor cleanup, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

State and federal regulators want the Department of Energy and its contractors to move forward with the cleanup of the Molten Salt Reactor - an experimental nuclear facility that's been sitting idle for nearly 40 years. DOE is already out of compliance with a previously negotiated cleanup agreement. The current status is what's known as an "informal dispute." The federal agency could face fines and penalties for the delays, but more likely there will be a modified agreement that establishes new timetables. The question is, When will that work be completed? "We expect to renegotiate an acceptable time frame for the salt removal," said John Owsley, the state's environmental oversight chief in Oak Ridge. Owsley was referring to the tons of radioactive salts in the basement of the reactor building, where the fuel mixture has been stored in tanks since reactor operations ceased in 1969.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/nov/07/doe-wants-to-stretch-nuke-reactor-cleanup/>

November 3, 2007

Moab uranium waste: Tailings tab heads closer to \$1 billion, *Salt Lake Tribune*

MOAB - The cost to clean up uranium waste on the Colorado River's edge has shot up. The U.S. Energy Department said its new estimate for removing the tailings is \$635 million to \$835 million. "This is a more realistic estimate," said DOE's Don Metzler, who oversees the cleanup, on Friday. The Energy Department is removing 16 million tons of tailings from the site, about three miles from Moab, to stop chemicals like ammonia from seeping into the Colorado River. The river is home to several protected fish species and serves as an important water source to more than 25 million people downstream. Previously, the price tag reached \$697 million. Metzler suggested to the state Radiation Control Board that a new, longer timeline boosted the price. "If you push out the project 10 years, it's more expensive," he said. The Energy Department awarded a contract for \$98.4 million this spring to begin hauling the 16 million tons of uranium-mill waste 32 miles north to Crescent Junction. And construction has already started on a 250-acre landfill for the contaminated waste.

http://www.sltrib.com/news/ci_7358210

November 2, 2007

NRC Publishes Strategic Assessment of Low-Level Radioactive Waste Regulatory Program, *NRC Press Release*

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has published the staff's strategic assessment of the agency's low-level radioactive waste (LLW) regulatory program, proposing several initiatives to meet impending challenges such as decreased disposal capacity and increased production of LLW as new reactors and other nuclear facilities come online. Those challenges include the anticipated closure to most of the nation in 2008 of the Barnwell, S.C., LLW disposal facility. Barnwell is currently the nation's only commercial disposal option for certain wastes, and its closure could force licensees to store waste on-site until other disposal options become available. In addition, operation of new uranium enrichment facilities, potential nuclear fuel reprocessing facilities and commercial nuclear power plants will create additional demand for LLW disposal capacity. The strategic assessment concludes that current NRC regulations on disposal of low-level radioactive waste fully protect the health and safety of workers and the public. However, the assessment identifies several measures that could improve the effectiveness of low-level waste management and regulation as disposal needs and circumstances change.

<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/news/2007/07-146.html>

November 2, 2007

Dozens of Organizations Ask Congress To Eliminate Funding For Dangerous Nuclear Waste Reprocessing Program, *Union of Concerned Scientists Press Release*

More than 40 national and local environmental, science and national security organizations this week sent a letter to Sens. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) and Pete Domenici (R-N.M.), urging them to eliminate funding for the Department of Energy's Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) plan for reprocessing spent nuclear fuel. The program, they wrote, "undermines U.S. nonproliferation policy, would cost taxpayers \$100 billion or more, and ... [would] not solve the nuclear waste problem. Sens. Dorgan and Domenici are chairman and ranking minority member, respectively, of the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations Committee. The committee has tentatively approved \$243 million of the \$405 million the Bush administration requested for GNEP. The House already has approved \$120 million. A final bill is expected sometime this fall.

http://www.ucsusa.org/news/press_release/dozens-of-organizations-ask-0078.html

November 1, 2007

Managing the Nuclear Fuel Cycle: Policy Implications of Expanding Global Access to Nuclear Power, *Congressional Research Service Report*

After several decades of decline and disfavor, nuclear power is attracting renewed interest. New permit applications for 30 reactors have been filed in the United States, and another 150 are planned or proposed globally, with about a dozen more already under construction. In the United States, interest appears driven, in part, by provisions in the 2005 Energy Policy Act authorizing streamlined licensing that combine construction and operating permits, and tax credits for production from advanced nuclear power facilities. Moreover, the U.S. Department of Energy proposes to spend billions of dollars to develop the next generation of nuclear power technology. Expanding global access to nuclear power, nevertheless, has the potential to lead to the spread of sensitive nuclear technology.

<http://www.opencrs.com/document/RL34234>

November 1, 2007

Nuke safety official praises Pantex, *Amarillo Globe and News*

The federal government will unveil its preferred plans for the future nuclear weapons complex later this fall, but a final decision won't be made until next summer, a top official said Wednesday. Under National Nuclear Security Administration plans, Pantex and four other sites are candidates for a new facility that would manufacture plutonium weapons cores and conduct nuclear materials research and development. Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman and NNSA Administrator Tom D'Agostino visited Pantex Wednesday to praise employees here for their work on finishing some major projects. Bodman left Pantex earlier Wednesday, but D'Agostino said the NNSA is now wrapping up a draft environmental impact study that will lay out government plans for the future warhead production network.

http://www.amarillo.com/stories/110107/new_8813363.shtml