

News from Around the Complex

September 2007

September 30, 2007

Secrecy marks transit plans: Energy Dept. hush about plutonium shipments that could begin Friday, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

As many as 3,000 containers of plutonium may be transported across Tennessee highways during the next couple of years. But state and local authorities won't know for sure unless there's a serious accident. The routes that will be used to transport the strategic nuclear material across the country are hush-hush and won't be shared in advance of the project. "It's extremely classified," said Jonathan Shradar, assistant press secretary with the U.S. Department of Energy in Washington. "We definitely don't confirm." Shipments could begin as early as Friday, according to the decision DOE announced Sept. 5.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/sep/30/secrecy-marks-transit-plans/>

September 28, 2007

Xcel wins suit over spent-fuel storage, *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

In a dispute over the cost of storing nuclear waste, a subsidiary of Xcel Energy has been awarded \$116 million in a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). The ruling of the U.S. Court of Federal Claims in Washington is subject to appeal. DOE officials were unavailable Friday for comment. The suit, which has been in the courts for nine years, centered on Xcel's bearing the cost of storing spent fuel at the company's Prairie Island and Monticello plants. The Xcel subsidiary, Northern States Power (NSP), like many other nuclear power plant owners, had a contract calling for the federal government to eventually ship and bury radioactive waste in a proposed underground site at Yucca Mountain in Nevada.

<http://www.startribune.com/535/story/1453389.html>

September 27, 2007

Replacement pit for W88 nuke approved, *United Press International*

WASHINGTON, Sept. 27 (UPI) -- The first W88 nuclear warhead to employ a replacement pit has been approved for the U.S. nuclear stockpile. The National Nuclear Security Administration of the U.S. Department of Energy said in a statement Thursday that "the first W88 nuclear warhead to employ a replacement pit officially was certified for entry into the United States nuclear weapons stockpile." "An essential piece of every U.S. nuclear weapon, the pit is typically made of plutonium and acts as a trigger, allowing a weapon to function. NNSA recently restored its ability to manufacture pits in small quantities," the statement said. "Rebuilding this W88 was an enormous undertaking that took NNSA over a decade and required the tremendous scientific and engineering expertise of the entire nuclear weapons complex," said NNSA Administrator Thomas D'Agostino.

http://www.upi.com/International_Security/Industry/Briefing/2007/09/27/replacement_pit_for_w88_nuke_approved/5782/

September 26, 2007

Maybe no dump at Yucca after all: First new nuclear plant in decades says it can store its own waste, *Las Vegas Sun*

WASHINGTON - For years Yucca Mountain and the future of nuclear energy in this country have been intertwined until, suddenly Tuesday, that seemed to no longer be the case. At a packed Capitol Hill news conference celebrating plans for the nation's

first new nuclear power plant in a generation, senators praised the project. Colorful charts showed what the future would bring. Then 45 minutes into the briefing the most important issue for Nevadans emerged: Would Yucca Mountain, the nation's planned repository 90 miles outside Las Vegas, be expected to store the nuclear waste? Not necessarily, came the answer. The chief executive of the firm submitting the first nuclear power application in nearly 30 years for a pair of plants in south Texas said that as far as he's concerned, the waste can stay on the company's 12,200-acre site for the next century.

<http://www.lasvegassun.com/sunbin/stories/lv-other/2007/sep/26/566651006.html>

September 24, 2007

Storing spent nuclear fuel is essential, painstaking for Monticello plant, *St. Cloud Times*

MONTICELLO — The planning Mark McKeown is putting into the latest building project at the Monticello nuclear plant would put a military general to shame. To prepare for the first above-ground storage of radioactive waste north of the Twin Cities, the project manager must dwell on every detail — from making sure the concrete slab on which the casks will be stored is perfectly smooth to tracking the daily progress of train cars hauling the storage units across the country. Construction began in June on the unit to store used, or spent, fuel from the nuclear reactors. The concrete storage modules are scheduled to arrive next month via rail car. By next summer, the construction will be complete, and the first casks will be loaded with spent fuel. It's a lot of effort for a facility that plant officials say is meant to store spent fuel only until the federal government builds a repository for the nation's nuclear waste.

<http://www.sctimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070924/NEWS01/109240022/1009>

September 24, 2007

Royal Society studies options for UK plutonium stockpiles, *World Nuclear News*

The report says that the UK's civil stockpile of separated plutonium now totals over 100 tonnes and has almost doubled in the past ten years. The stockpile is largely the by-product of commercial reprocessing of used nuclear fuel from UK power plants. According to the Royal Society, the potential consequences of a major security breach or accident involving the separated plutonium are so severe that the government should urgently develop and implement a strategy for its long term use or disposal. The report recommends that such a strategy should be considered as an integral part of the energy and radioactive waste policies that are currently being developed. The report suggests that the best current option is to convert the stockpiled plutonium into mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel, which can then be used as fuel in nuclear power reactors. It suggests that the plutonium would then be harder to steal due to the higher radioactivity of used fuel, which would require reprocessing in order to obtain weapons-usable plutonium.

http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/wasteRecycling/Royal_Society_studies_options_for_UK_plutonium_stockpiles-240907.shtml

Report available here: <http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk/document.asp?latest=1&id=7080>

September 24, 2007

Chemical test barrier at Hanford stopping atomic waste, *Tri-City Herald*

Less radioactive strontium appears to be reaching the banks of the Columbia River at Hanford thanks to an underground chemical barrier still undergoing testing. This

spring Fluor Hanford injected a 300-foot-long natural chemical barrier along the river near Hanford's N Reactor as part of a test of technology developed by Pacific Northwest National Laboratory. More injections are planned, but results already are promising. "At a number of wells we are seeing a dramatic decrease in strontium in the ground water," said Mike Thompson, ground water geologist for the Department of Energy. "It's very encouraging." One monitoring well between the barrier and the nearby Columbia River has had strontium levels decrease from more than 1,000 picocuries per liter to about 140 picocuries. Another well has had levels drop from about 4,500 picocuries per liter to about 200 picocuries.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/story/9328034p-9243209c.html>

September 20, 2007

Nuclear material from S. Korea brought to Y-12, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

OAK RIDGE — About 4 pounds of highly enriched uranium — of potential use in a nuclear weapon — arrived here Wednesday after it was removed from a reactor complex in South Korea and airlifted to the United States. The material will be safeguarded at the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant, which houses the U.S. stockpile of highly enriched uranium, and later will be "down-blended" to remove its weapons potential. According to a press statement issued by the National Nuclear Security Administration in Washington, the highly enriched uranium was contained in 11 fresh fuel assemblies for research reactors at the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute in Daejeon, South Korea.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/sep/20/nuclear-material-froms-korea-brought-to-y-12/>

September 20, 2007

Full construction resumes at Hanford vit plant, *Tri-City Herald*

Thirty-five truckloads of concrete will be poured at the High Level Waste Facility at Hanford's vitrification plant today. The pour marks the resumption of full construction after concerns about earthquake design standards halted construction on two key buildings 20 months ago. It puts the Waste Treatment, or vitrification, plant back on a revised schedule to begin turning millions of gallons of radioactive waste into a stable glass form in 2019 for disposal. Today will mark the first major structural construction completed on the High Level Waste Facility since late 2005. Major structural construction on the Pretreatment Facility, the second building affected by earthquake design questions, is expected to begin in January. Together, the two buildings have a footprint the size of six football fields.

<http://www.tri-cityherald.com/tch/local/story/9316536p-9231302c.html>

September 18, 2007

EPA Endorses "Way Ahead" Plan for West Valley Demonstration Project; Agency on hand to recognize shipment of nearly 20,000 low-level radioactive waste drums, *EPA Press Release*

(Ashford, N.Y.) The people of West Valley, New York and Cattaraugus County celebrated an important milestone today at the West Valley Demonstration Project as they marked the safe shipment, in just over one year, of nearly 20,000 drums filled with low-level radioactive waste for off-site disposal. Alan J. Steinberg, EPA Regional Administrator joined James Rispoli, U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Assistant Secretary of Energy for Environmental Management as EPA announced its support for "The Way Ahead," a plan developed by all of the cooperating federal and state agencies involved in moving the West valley project forward in carrying out a comprehensive, practical and environmentally responsible action plan for cleaning up the former nuclear fuel reprocessing site.

<http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/0/f5e1bc14405f18f18525735a0057b0e7?OpenDocument>

September 16, 2007

More Nations Back U.S. Nuclear Project, *The Guardian (UK)*

VIENNA, Austria (AP) - A U.S.-initiated project that aims to reduce the dangers of nuclear proliferation and control radioactive waste gained support Sunday, as 11 more nations signed on with original members Russia, China, France and Japan. Under the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, a limited number of countries including the U.S. and Russia would provide uranium fuel to other nations for powering reactors to generate electricity, and then retrieve the fuel for reprocessing. This would deprive those nations of their own nuclear fuel enrichment programs, which can be used to make atomic arms. The dangers of uranium enrichment have come into sharp focus over the past four years because of the international standoff with Iran, which has defied a U.N. Security Council demand that it freeze development of the activity. The Iranian government says it seeks to use enrichment only for generating energy, and there is general recognition that nations should have access to low-enriched uranium for such peaceful uses.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/latest/story/0,,-6926285,00.html>

September 15, 2007

Pantex considering new storage facilities, report states, *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*

AMARILLO - Pantex is eyeing the need for increased plutonium storage as the plant dismantles more nuclear warheads in the coming years. The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, a nuclear safety watchdog agency, said in a recent report that Pantex is considering plans for six new nuclear material storage buildings in Zone 4. Thousands of plutonium weapons cores from dismantled warheads, dubbed pits, are now stored in Zone 4, a heavily guarded series of underground reinforced concrete bunkers. Contractor BWXT said it requested funding to begin the planning process for the proposed facilities, a request the contractor said is just one option it is considering for future pit storage. If the National Nuclear Security Administration approves funding for this stage of the planning process, called Critical Decision 0, BWXT Pantex will move forward with the project.

http://www.lubbockonline.com/stories/091507/reg_091507093.shtml

September 12, 2007

Cleanup cost for K-25, K-27 now \$757M, *Knoxville News Sentinel*

OAK RIDGE — The cost of dismantling the K-25 and K-27 uranium-enrichment facilities has grown to \$757 million, according to a new estimate released by Bechtel Jacobs Co., the government's cleanup manager. That's more than double the original forecast and up significantly from a \$502 million cost estimate a year and a half ago. Work on K-27, the smaller of the two facilities, won't be completed until the last quarter of 2012, based on the revised schedule. That's four years later than the original plan, and it's not clear if Bechtel Jacobs will be around to finish the big cleanup project it started a few years ago.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/sep/12/cleanup-cost-fork-25-k-27-now-757m/>

September 11, 2007

YUCCA MOUNTAIN: State presses DOE on use of water, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*

Nevada attorneys filed a pair of motions Monday in U.S. District Court in Las Vegas asking a judge to compel the Department of Energy to stop using the state's water for drilling bore holes at the planned Yucca Mountain nuclear waste site. The motion by Senior Deputy Attorney General Marta Adams asks the court for an order to make DOE "immediately cease its use of water for all bore hole drilling irrespective of 'phase,'" and in the meantime reach a three-way agreement on appropriate water use at the site, 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas. U.S. District Judge Roger Hunt on Aug. 31 denied an emergency motion by lawyers for DOE who wanted him to block State Engineer Tracy Taylor's June 1 order for DOE to stop using Nevada's water for the second phase of its bore hole drilling project. The DOE sent a letter to Taylor on Thursday saying it had stopped using water for the second phase but would continue using it for the first phase until that phase is completed by the end of this month.

<http://www.lvrj.com/news/9708392.html>

September 11, 2007

Nation's nuclear waste storage industry in a jam - and Utah in the spotlight, *Salt Lake Tribune*

LAS VEGAS - The nuclear waste industry is preoccupied with one big question these days: What to do with trainloads of low-level nuclear waste that soon won't have anywhere to go. "This is a national problem, requiring a national solution," said Alan Pasternak, technical director for utilities, academic institutions and other low-level waste generators in California. And it was a problem that got lots of attention last week at a conference of regulators and contractors in the business of arranging for disposal of radioactive rubbish from reactors, medical tests and procedures and research - not the highly contaminated spent fuel rods. Utah finds itself at the center of the discussion. One reason is Salt Lake City-based EnergySolutions, the country's biggest nuclear waste company and operator of a South Carolina nuclear waste site that is being phased out. Another reason is that EnergySolutions operates the busiest of the nation's three commercial landfills for radioactive waste, in Tooele County, about 80 miles west of Salt Lake City.

http://www.sltrib.com/ci_6859318

September 7, 2007

Agencies reveal new proposed deadlines, *Hanford News (Tri City Herald Online)*

SEATTLE - Hanford regulators are considering living with long delays in emptying Hanford's leak-prone underground tanks and also starting operations of the vitrification plant. In exchange they may require more effort to clean up Hanford contamination deep underground and in ground water, particularly in plumes closest to the Columbia River. "We don't have a deal," said Nick Ceto, EPA Hanford program manager. "These are things we have talked about that we think we have some agreement on." After five negotiating sessions that began in May, the Department of Energy and its regulators - the state of Washington and the Environmental Protection Agency - have not been able to reach a deal on new legally binding deadlines for Hanford cleanup.

<http://www.hanfordnews.com/news/2007/story/9284309p-9198805c.html>

September 6, 2007

Judge denies Hanford dismissal motion, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

YAKIMA -- A judge has denied the federal government's request to dismiss part of a lawsuit seeking an assessment of natural resource damages caused by decades of plutonium production at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. The Yakama Nation sued the U.S. Department of Energy in 2002, seeking restoration of soil, water, plant and animal life that may have been damaged by radioactive waste and other hazardous

releases. The Nez Perce Tribe later joined the lawsuit, as did Washington and Oregon. The Energy Department, which manages Hanford cleanup, argued it was too soon to determine if there were injuries to the environment or whether reparations should be paid.

http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/330499_hanford06.html

September 5, 2007

Department of Energy Announces Decision to Consolidate Surplus Plutonium in South Carolina, DOE Press Release

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) today announced its decision to consolidate surplus, non-pit plutonium at its Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina, greatly reducing storage costs and significantly enhancing security across the nation's weapons complex. DOE will begin shipping the surplus, non-pit plutonium no sooner than 30 days from today and under the plan this surplus plutonium is expected to be shipped to SRS by 2010. "Consolidation is a key part of the Department's efforts to properly manage surplus plutonium and follows our dedication to non-proliferation, environmental management and national security," Assistant Secretary of Energy for Environmental Management James Rispoli said. "Today's decision continues the momentum for the safe disposition of surplus materials." The surplus plutonium to be consolidated at SRS will come from the following DOE facilities: the Hanford Site in Washington; the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California; and the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. Some 2,300 plutonium storage containers from Hanford and close to 700 from Lawrence Livermore and Los Alamos Labs will be moved by secure transport to SRS. The surplus material to be consolidated is "non-pit" plutonium, which comes from sources other than nuclear weapons triggers, or pits.

<http://energy.gov/news/5471.htm>

September 5, 2007

Ecology Calls DOE Proposal "Unacceptable", KNDO Tri-Cities

RICHLAND, Wash.- The Department of Ecology calls the Department of Energy's proposal to bring more "Greater than Class-C" waste to Hanford is unacceptable. DOE has proposed Hanford as one of eleven sites around the country to store more waste. In a letter to Department of Energy heads, Ecology leaders say it's the plan to send more waste here to Hanford is unacceptable and says DOE doesn't address current cleanup plans or the fact that cleanup is already years behind schedule. The proposal names Hanford as a potential site for the Greater than Class-C waste. That's the highest level of radioactivity that's still considered low-level waste. Ecology says Hanford doesn't need that and even more, the state and DOE already agreed Hanford wouldn't be the site for waste shipments from any other DOE sites.

http://www.kndo.com/Global/story.asp?S=7032640&nav=menu484_2_7

September 5, 2007

Canada to reprocess other nations' nuclear waste, The Globe and Mail

Canada will eventually get into the business of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel, Natural Resources Minister Gary Lunn said yesterday as the government considers an invitation to join a major international effort to promote nuclear technology worldwide. As he headed to a meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation forum in Australia yesterday, Prime Minister Stephen Harper was expected to face questions on whether Canada will join the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, a group of major nuclear powers dedicated to spreading nuclear technology into developing countries. U.S. President George W. Bush - who is leading the GNEP process - has suggested that, as a price of entry, major uranium-producing countries

should agree to accept and dispose of nuclear waste from countries to which they sell the uranium for reactor fuel.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20070905.wuranium05/BNStory/National/home>

September 5, 2007

NRC changing secrecy policy, *Knoxville News Sentinel*

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is changing a policy that has kept thousands of documents on an East Tennessee nuclear fuel producer from the public. The NRC also revealed Tuesday that the policy, enacted in 2004 because of security concerns, was used to withhold documents from more facilities than previously disclosed. The policy led documents from Nuclear Fuel Services of Erwin, Tenn., and a similar facility in Virginia run by BWX Technologies to be stamped "official use only" for more than three years, with other documents retroactively pulled from the NRC's public records. On Tuesday, NRC spokesman Roger Hannah said the NRC also withheld documents on a Honeywell uranium conversion facility in Metropolis, Ill., and a USEC uranium enrichment plant in Paducah, Ky., based on the policy.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/sep/05/nrc-changing-secrecy-policy/>

September 4, 2007

70% of Storage Facilities for Spent Nuclear Fuel Filled, *The Korea Times*

The lack of storage facilities for spent nuclear fuel is becoming a headache for South Korea's atomic power generation, as about 70 percent of existing facilities have already been filled with high-level radioactive waste from nuclear power plants across the country. Some storage areas, which are expected to reach full capacity next year, are in the process of being expanded. But, without new ones, South Korea will have nowhere to keep nuclear waste from 2016, according to Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power (KHNP) on Tuesday. High-level waste is spent nuclear fuel that arises from the use of uranium in a nuclear reactor, containing the fission products and transuranic elements generated in the reactor core. High-level waste, which is very radioactive, is dangerous and, therefore, requires special shielding during handling and transport. It also needs cooling since it generates a lot of heat because of the high radioactivity level. A typical large nuclear reactor produces some 25 to 30 tons of spent fuel per year. If the fuel is reprocessed and vitrified, the waste would only fill up about three cubic meters per year.

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2007/09/123_9561.html

September 4, 2007

Federal judge says drilling must stop at nuke dump site in Nevada, *Las Vegas Sun*

LAS VEGAS (AP) - A federal judge has ruled that Nevada can shut off water needed for bore hole drilling at the proposed Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository. In a strongly worded order focusing on federal "credibility and good faith," U.S. District Judge Roger Hunt in Las Vegas said the Department of Energy could not ignore state limitations and continue using water for drilling test holes near the repository site. "This entire 'crisis' is self-imposed and self-created," Hunt said in his 24-page order, dated Friday but distributed among the parties on Tuesday. "The only argument the DOE makes is that because the site has been approved ... it has the authority to do whatever it wishes," the judge said. "It has failed to demonstrate the necessity of its voracious water demands."

<http://www.lasvegassun.com/sunbin/stories/nevada/2007/sep/04/090410240.html>

September 3, 2007

Canada silent as nuclear energy partnership with US, Australia, others takes shape, *Canadian Press*

OTTAWA (CP) — When Prime Minister Stephen Harper departs for Australia on Tuesday for a summit of pan-Pacific leaders, he'll be carrying with him a secret agenda that is quite literally radioactive. Harper will face questions from both Australian Prime Minister John Howard and U.S. President George W. Bush over Canada's participation in a sweeping American-led initiative still in its infancy. The initiative, called the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, proposes that nuclear energy-using countries and uranium-exporting countries band together in a new nuclear club to promote and safeguard the industry. Central to the plan is a proposal that all used nuclear fuel be repatriated to the original uranium exporting country for disposal. That should be big news in Canada, the world's largest uranium producer. But to date, the Canadian government's response is a closely guarded secret. In fact, there's been virtually no public debate at all.

<http://canadianpress.google.com/article/ALeqM5hoJfTYC6Qz0kXsBtkOfuTZ2ew9WQ>

September 3, 2007

Debate on Y-12 could change, *Knoxville News Sentinel*

OAK RIDGE — Critics have challenged the modernization program at the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant for years, mostly questioning the need for new facilities in the post-Cold War period. As the cost of projects goes up, however, the debate could shift to the program's affordability. The National Nuclear Security Administration recently acknowledged that the biggest project on the horizon, the Uranium Processing Facility, could cost as much as \$3.5 billion. U.S. Rep. Zach Wamp, R-Tenn., took a wait-and-see attitude when asked if UPF could make it through the appropriations process with a price tag that high.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2007/sep/03/debate-on-y-12-could-change/>

September 3, 2007

Colorado uranium mine to reopen as prices soar, *Deseret News*

GATEWAY, Colo. — With demand for uranium soaring as Asian economies expand, the old Packrat uranium mine is expected to reopen once Mesa County authorities approve. Energy Resources Corp., based in Canada, filed a request for a conditional use permit to open the mine on the cliffs above Gateway three weeks ago, the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel reported. Gateway is on the Colorado-Utah border about 220 miles west of Denver and 35 miles southwest of Grand Junction. Energy Resources said the mine likely would employ 20 people and be open for 10 years. In the past five years, metal-mining claims have risen on Western lands by 80 percent, according to the Bureau of Land Management. Colorado and Utah are the leaders in uranium claims.

<http://deseretnews.com/article/1,5143,695206231,00.html>