

News from Around the Complex

February 1 – February 28, 2009

Available on-line at <http://www.fffcleanupnews.org/news.htm>

February 27, 2009

New Security Lapse at Los Alamos Triggers Angry Response From Energy Department, *Global Security Newswire*

WASHINGTON -- Plutonium handling practices are so poor at a major U.S. nuclear-weapon laboratory that they threaten the facility's ability to function at all, Energy Department officials warned in a letter this week (see GSN, Feb. 12). In January, the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico reported to Energy Department officials that an "inventory difference" had "exceeded alarm limits," according to a letter back to the laboratory from two National Nuclear Security Administration officials. The Feb. 23 letter was acquired by the Project on Government Oversight, a watchdog organization that has persistently raised alarms over lax security practices at Los Alamos and other nuclear laboratories. The inventory difference involves improper accounting of materials at Technical Area 55, the facility's plutonium research and processing facility, according to a Los Alamos release issued yesterday. The area is responsible in part for producing the plutonium cores for refurbished U.S. nuclear warheads (see GSN, Dec. 17, 2008).

http://gsn.nti.org/gsn/ts_20090227_5921.php

February 27, 2009

Y-12 cleanup stimulus: \$250M, hundreds of jobs, *Knoxville News-Sentinel Blog from Frank Munger, staff reporter*

Hundreds of millions of dollars from the government's stimulus package are on the way to Oak Ridge to bolster environmental cleanup efforts and accelerate the demolition of old buildings at the Y-12 National Security Complex and Oak Ridge National Laboratory, officials said today. "We're going to receive over a quarter of a billion dollars of money through the EM (environmental management) program to start and accelerate the cleanup of Y-12," Darrel Kohlhorst, the plant's general manager, told a crowd this morning at New Hope Center. It was the first time that Oak Ridge officials have gotten specific in addressing funding associated with the stimulus package. * * * Jeff Smith, ORNL's deputy lab director for operations, said the lab is expecting to get about \$100 million this year to jump-start the demolition activities there. He declined to estimate the number of jobs attached to the stimulus money for cleanup at ORNL.

http://blogs.knoxnews.com/knx/munger/2009/02/y12_cleanup_stimulus_250m_hun_d.html

February 26, 2009

Utah, EnergySolutions square off in court, *The Salt Lake Tribune*

Imagine a Utah that cannot shut the gate on foreign radioactive waste, cannot outlaw hotter low-level waste and cannot even revoke the license of a nuclear waste disposal site within its borders. That anything-goes scenario might well become reality if EnergySolutions Inc. wins its legal quest to strip a regional waste agency of its legal powers, according to a lawyer for the state of Utah. The issue is at the core of a case argued Thursday before U.S. District Judge Ted Stewart. EnergySolutions says a regional oversight agency has no say over the company's mile-square disposal site in Tooele County, since it's a private business with cross-border commerce rights granted by the U.S. Constitution.

http://www.sltrib.com/news/ci_11792331

February 26, 2009

Rule change could mean indefinite nuclear waste storage in Vernon,
Brattleboro Reformer

BRATTLEBORO -- Could nuclear waste generated by Vermont Yankee power plant be stored for an indefinite period on the banks of the Connecticut River? State legislators, area activists and the attorneys general of Vermont, Massachusetts and New York say a close reading of a proposed change to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Waste Confidence Decision could mean Vermont will be stuck with spent nuclear fuel for a long time. * * * On Oct. 6, the NRC submitted its proposed rule change to the Federal Register. On Feb. 6, the attorneys general submitted a joint filing contesting the change is unsupported by science and history and violates the National Environmental Protection Act.

http://www.reformer.com/ci_11789082?source=most_viewed

February 26, 2009

Oregon to join Hanford lawsuit, *Tri-City Herald*

Oregon plans to join the state of Washington's lawsuit against the Department of Energy to force it to complete the cleanup of Hanford, Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski and Attorney General John Kroger announced Wednesday. "Further delay is unacceptable," Kulongoski said in a statement. "The federal government must make this cleanup a priority and meet its obligations to address the environmental and public health risks that the Hanford site continues to pose." The state of Washington filed a lawsuit in late November in an attempt to force DOE to move faster to empty radioactive waste from underground tanks at the Hanford nuclear reservation and treat the waste. The suit was filed after DOE fell years behind schedules in the legally binding Tri-Party Agreement.

<http://www.hanfordnews.com/news/2008/story/12914.html>

February 25, 2009

Federal budget will contain minimal funding for Yucca Mountain, open look for alternatives, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*

The Obama administration is poised to move forward with a blue ribbon panel to look at alternatives for dealing with the nation's highly radioactive waste but the Energy Department for the time being will continue to pursue a license to put it in Yucca Mountain. Language in President Barack Obama's budget outline, which is expected to be released Thursday, says the "Yucca Mountain program will be scaled back to those costs necessary to answer inquiries from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, while the Administration devises a new strategy toward nuclear waste disposal."

http://www.lvrj.com/news/breaking_news/40331302.html

February 24, 2009

Department of Energy Loses Track of Radioactive Material, *Washington Post Blog from Robert O'Harrow Jr., financial staff reporter*

The Department of Energy has done a poor job of tracking nuclear materials it has loaned under licenses to contractors, educational institutions and other organizations, according to an investigation by DOE Inspector General Gregory Friedman and his staff. In some cases, the department cannot say where the heavily radioactive substances are, how they're being used or whether they have been disposed of, the auditors found. At issue is the tracking system used by DOE known as the Nuclear Materials Management and Safeguards System. Based on the new report, the tracking system appears to be a health -- and could it be, national

security? -- nightmare. It could be that the missing nuclear materials -- including depleted and normal uranium -- has been disposed of and that the particularities of accounting for the stuff were ignored.

http://voices.washingtonpost.com/government-inc/2009/02/department_of.html

Full report: <http://www.ig.energy.gov/documents/IG-0813.pdf>

February 24, 2009

Fission-fusion hybrid mops up nuclear waste, *Cosmos Online*

SYDNEY: U.S. scientists have designed a new system that they say could rid the world of radioactive waste produced by nuclear power stations, opening the door to faster, cleaner and more efficient energy production. "Many people will be willing to give nuclear [power] a chance if the waste could be destroyed," said Prashant Valanju, a nuclear physicist from the University of Texas in Austin. Valanju is part of a team whose "waste deconstruction" scheme, reported last month in the journal *Fusion Engineering and Design*, proposes the use of nuclear fusion to break down the waste from existing fission power plants.

<http://www.cosmosmagazine.com/news/2589/fission-fusion-hybrids-could-mop-nuclear-waste>

February 24, 2009

Omnibus bill would increase Hanford spending, *Tri-City Herald*

The Hanford budget for the current year would be just shy of \$2 billion under the 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Bill made public Monday. The bill also includes \$71.2 million to complete the Physical Sciences Facility at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland ahead of schedule. The Hanford nuclear reservation money would be an increase of \$146.5 million above the amount proposed by the Bush administration last year. Hanford has been operating under a continuing resolution passed by Congress since Oct. 1, the start of fiscal 2009, because no budget has been approved for the Department of Energy. "The Bush administration left a hole in Hanford funding," said Sen. Patty Murray, in a statement. "We are now beginning to climb out of it."

http://www.tri-cityherald.com/kennewick_pasco_richland/story/488479.html

February 24, 2009

First truckloads of K-25 waste leave site: Contaminated debris hauled on specially built road, *Knoxville News-Sentinel*

OAK RIDGE - The first of what eventually will be thousands of truckloads left the K-25 site Monday, hauling contaminated construction debris to the Department of Energy's nuclear landfill seven miles away. In mid-December, workers began demolition of the World War II-era K-25 building, quickly generating large piles of waste at the former uranium-enrichment plant. While demolition work continues over the next few years, there will be daily shipments to the landfill - using a specially built haul road so the waste won't be transported on public roads or disrupt local traffic. Bechtel Jacobs Co., DOE's environmental manager, is heading the K-25 demolition. Washington Safety Management Solutions is the subcontractor for waste shipments.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2009/feb/24/first-truckloads-of-k-25-waste-leave-site/>

February 23, 2009

DOE gets final numbers for budget proposal, *KIDK News (Idaho)*

IDAHO FALLS - This year's fiscal budget proposal could allow \$470-million dollars to go toward funding the clean-up project at the INL. "It's greater than the President

requested initially and it's going to allow us to keep the cleanup work going," says Joseph Campbell with the Idaho Clean-Up Project. The DOE is still operating under the budget from fiscal year 2008. The budget was supposed to be passed in October, but they are still waiting and hopeful for the proposed increase. "It's going to allow us to get everything we were contracted to do finished and bring on the employees we need to get that work done," says Campbell. In addition to the budget, the stimulus package would be a big bonus. "It's looking like not only will we not be laying folks off, we're going to be hiring to get all this work done," he adds.
<http://www.kidk.com/news/local/40202077.html>

February 18, 2009

Chu: Keep Yucca license on track -- for now, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*
WASHINGTON — Energy Secretary Steven Chu told a group of state officials this morning he favors moving forward toward licensing a nuclear waste repository in Nevada, although whether it would ever be built is another thing altogether, according to officials familiar with the meeting. Nuclear waste was one of the topics on the agenda when Chu met with 12 to 15 state public service leaders attending an annual conference of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners. Regarding the Yucca Mountain Project, "it sounds like what he said was positive in that (DOE) wants the process to continue. It made our guys happy," said Rob Thormeyer, the association's communications director.
http://www.lvrj.com/news/breaking_news/39803867.html

February 17, 2009

Hanford board warns DOE about Yucca Mountain delay, *Tri-City Herald*
HANFORD -- The Hanford Advisory Board is cautioning the Department of Energy to make sure it has some place to store vitrified Hanford waste for decades, but not permanently, because of delays in opening a national repository to dispose of the waste. The Nuclear Waste Policy Act requires that high-level radioactive waste from Hanford be disposed of in a deep geologic repository after the vitrification plant starts operating and turning the waste into a stable glass form. Congress directed the Department of Energy to study only Yucca Mountain, Nev., for the nation's repository in 1987, but whether or when Yucca Mountain might be ready to accept Hanford waste is unknown.
<http://www.hanfordnews.com/news/2008/story/12857.html>

February 16, 2009

The Half-life of Memory: The struggle to remember the nuclear West, *High Country News*
We stand at a barbed-wire fence, looking past a locked gate to a paved road that leads nowhere. Beyond a "Road Closed" sign and piles of dirt and rock, prairie grasses gone brown with the approach of winter drop eastward. In the distance, sheets of dust blow across the horizon. We have been told that behind the fence lies a stirring swath of High Plains ecology, a vast undeveloped acreage within one of the nation's fastest-growing suburban landscapes. * * * And Wes McKinley, the Colorado state legislator who stands beside me peering through the gated entrance, has been told he cannot enter. McKinley had followed protocol and asked the legislative staff at the state Capitol to request a tour of this land, now known as the Rocky Flats National Wildlife Refuge.
http://www.hcn.org/issues/41.3/the-half-life-of-memory/article_view?b_start:int=0&-C=

February 16, 2009

SRS taking care with environmental impact, *Aiken Standard*

Fragile ecosystems and wetlands provide the Department of Energy's (DOE) Savannah River Site (SRS) a unique opportunity to incorporate a simple yet effective means of groundwater monitoring, soil sampling and educational training to college interns. A method called hand auguring is being used in 16 shallow wells along the waterways in R Area, one of five areas at SRS that for decades were home to operating production reactors. Hand auguring is a minimally invasive means of groundwater sampling that is designed to protect the wetlands and wildlife that frequent the area. It consists of manually inserting drill rods into the subsurface in small increments, to allow the testing of subsurface soils, until the maximum depth is achieved. Once auguring is complete, engineers are able to install a well and sample the groundwater for contaminants and monitor the progress of natural attenuation.

<http://www.aikenstandard.com/Local/0213SRSMonitoring>

February 14, 2009

Can anyone recall what we put in our nuclear dump? *The Guardian*

"We need your help," begins the plaintive ad on the front of the Whitehaven News. Did you work at Sellafield in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s? Were you by chance in the job of disposing of radioactive material? If so, the owners of Britain's nuclear waste dump would very much like to hear from you: they want you to tell them what you dumped - and where you put it. The reason for the ad is simple: the Cumbrian facility's new operator, LLW Repository Ltd, has discovered that the historic records of disposal supposedly kept by the British state are far from complete.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/feb/14/sellafield-records-nuclear-waste>

February 13, 2009

EnergySolutions seeks deal with state for its N-dump; Secret plan » It would split profits from imported waste with state, *The Salt Lake Tribune*

EnergySolutions, the Salt Lake City-based nuclear waste company, is stepping forward with a partial fix for the state's budget problem: foreign radioactive waste. For weeks, the company has worked quietly with state lawmakers on a proposal to have the state split EnergySolutions' profits from the disposal of foreign waste, profits that could mean as much as \$1 billion over a decade. There's just one obstacle -- but it's a big one. EnergySolutions hasn't been cleared to take foreign waste at its mile-square disposal site in Tooele County. Changing that would require Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. to drop his adamant opposition or the Legislature to override him.

http://www.sltrib.com/ci_11702889

February 13, 2009

SRS is looking to add storage: Plan would bring 500 containers of plutonium to site, *Augusta Chronicle*

Savannah River Site is exploring options to expand its K Area storage facility to accommodate 500 additional containers of plutonium from other nuclear weapons sites. The plans stem from a 2007 decision by the U.S. Energy Department to consolidate surplus plutonium from three sites -- Hanford in Washington State, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California and Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. The original plan called for shipping 2,300 containers from Hanford, 96 from Los Alamos and 115 from Lawrence Livermore, said Allen Gunter, senior technical adviser for Savannah River Site's Nuclear Materials Stabilization Project.

http://chronicle.augusta.com/stories/2009/02/13/met_511242.shtml

February 12, 2009

Hot waste still on hold in Oak Ridge, *Knoxville News Sentinel Blog*

According to EnergX exec Tony Buhl, the Transuranic Waste Processing Center in Oak Ridge has processed and packaged about 15 cubic meters of remote-handled transuranic waste and is awaiting approval to send it to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico. Buhl said reviews have been completed and that Oak Ridge officials are waiting on a shipping schedule from DOE's Carlsbad Office. "It's going to be in the next month," he said Wednesday. "I'm quite confident of that." *** It's not clear whether "in the next month" will satisfy regulators for shipping RH waste to WIPP, although there's been some leniency in the past because of the technical difficulties of processing the radioactive materials and access limitations at the disposal site in New Mexico. John Owsley, the Oak Ridge oversight chief for the Tennessee Dept. of Environment and Conservation, said the enforceable milestone for initiating shipments of remote-handled wastes is Feb. 28. The shipping date has already been extended at least once before.

http://blogs.knoxnews.com/knx/munger/2009/02/hot_waste_still_on_hold_in_oak.html

February 12, 2009

Stimulus bill includes enough to secure 3,000 Hanford jobs, *Tri-City Herald*

The final version of the federal economic stimulus bill includes nearly \$2 billion for Hanford cleanup -- enough to create or preserve close to 3,000 jobs, Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., said Wednesday. As a House-Senate conference committee worked to complete negotiations, Murray said agreement had been reached on a final amount of \$6 billion for cleanup at the Hanford nuclear reservation and other Department of Energy sites. "It is just stunning," said Gary Petersen, vice president of the Tri-City Development Council. "The (heavy) lift that Patty Murray did on this one is simply astounding and took both our state senators to do." The committee reconciled the \$6.4 billion in the Senate bill with the \$500 million the House approved, ending at the upper end of the range. The revised stimulus bill next must be approved by the full House and Senate and then go to President Obama for signing as soon as early next week.

http://www.tri-cityherald.com/kennewick_pasco_richland/story/476528.html

February 11, 2009

New technology finds lost irradiated fuel, *Tri-City Herald*

HANFORD -- New technology developed by Washington Closure Hanford is detecting irradiated fuel lost in Hanford's burial grounds before it leaves the excavator bucket. It can detect gamma radiation from cesium 137 in irradiated fuel and distinguish it from the cobalt 60 found in most of the other irradiated and rusting metal discarded in the burial grounds, including those with high radiation. "There's definitely a lot of fuel out there and we want every piece of it found," said John Price, environmental restoration project manager for the state Department of Ecology, a Hanford regulator. Hanford workers have found 74 pieces or fragments of highly radioactive fuel as they excavate World War II and Cold War burial grounds not far from the Columbia River.

http://www.hanfordnews.com/news/2008/story/12825.html?mi_email=Tri-City%20Herald_Hanford+Stories

February 11, 2009

Europe steps towards shared repository concept, *World Nuclear News*

Following several years of preliminary work, 14 European countries have set up a working group to consider establishing a European Repository Development Organization (ERDO) to collaborate on nuclear waste disposal. The proposal for a "staged, adaptive implementation strategy" for an ERDO results from the EC-sponsored SAPIERR Project (Strategic Action Plan for Implementation of European Regional Repositories), which held its final symposium on 27 January in Brussels. The results of studies on the viability of shared, regional European geological repositories were presented to 50 participants from 21 countries. The aspects considered included organizational and legal issues, economic impacts, safety and security considerations, and public and political attitudes to multinational repositories. The 14 countries backing the proposal are: Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

<http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/newsarticle.aspx?id=24640>

February 9, 2009

NNSA Ships Additional Surplus Special Nuclear Material From Livermore: Shipment Reduces High-security Material Onsite By An Additional 20 Percent, NNSA Press Release

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) announced today that over 55 percent of the plutonium and uranium materials stored at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) in California have been relocated. The material was moved to the Savannah River site in South Carolina and the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, under high security. "This latest shipment reduces the inventory of special nuclear material at Livermore Laboratory by an additional 20 percent for a total reduction of 55 percent since 2006," said NNSA Administrator Thomas D'Agostino. "We continue to do these shipments safely and securely and have accelerated this project by two years. We are well on our way to keeping our commitment to the Livermore community and the nation as a whole." The shipment is part of NNSA's plan to remove high-security nuclear material from LLNL by 2012. This is the seventh shipment to leave LLNL since the de-inventory project was initiated.

<http://nnsa.energy.gov/2280.htm>

February 7, 2009

Bomb Plants Could Shift to Control of Pentagon, New York Times

The Obama administration is considering whether to shift the management of nuclear weapons production to the Pentagon from the Energy Department, a step that would end more than 60 years of civilian control over nuclear bomb manufacture. The goal would be to better focus the Energy Department on energy research, production and conservation, central priorities of the new administration. The White House has ordered the Defense Department and the Energy Department to study the costs and the benefits of transferring two national laboratories that design weapons, the sprawling Nevada site where they can be tested and all or part of four major plants around the country that build and maintain bombs and store weapons fuel.

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/07/washington/07nuke.html?_r=1&ref=us

February 6, 2009

Washington state, feds agree on Hanford cleanup, Tri-City Herald

KENNEWICK, Wash. (AP) - State and federal officials have agreed to new deadlines for cleaning up groundwater and some radioactive waste areas at the nation's most contaminated nuclear site, but a lawsuit over other missed deadlines remains in

court. Southeast Washington's Hanford nuclear reservation, created as part of the top-secret Manhattan Project to build the atomic bomb during World War II, has been a focus of extensive cleanup efforts for two decades. In that time, the pact that governs cleanup has been changed more than 400 times, with many delays. The three parties to the pact - the state Department of Ecology, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy - announced an agreement Friday on more proposed changes.

<http://www.hanfordnews.com/news/2008/story/12801.html>

February 4, 2009

K East Basin turns into Hanford history, *Tri-City Herald*

The below-ground walls of Hanford's notorious K East Basin are being turned to rubble with a hammer and concrete processor mounted on excavators. "It was built to last forever," said Mike Swartz, deputy vice president at CH2M Hill Plateau Remediation Co. "It's hard to beat up." Tearing out the walls of the pool is one of the final steps in cleanup of the leak-prone basin to allow removal of radioactively contaminated soil beneath the concrete pool. The basin was built to cool fuel irradiated at the attached K East Basin to produce plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons program. But as processing of fuel ended with the Cold War, 1,100 tons of highly radioactive fuel rods were left stranded in the basin.

http://www.tri-cityherald.com/kennewick_pasco_richland/story/467712.html

Connections

Max Power, a former FFTF member from Washington State who retired from the Washington State Department of Ecology in 2004, recently authored a three-part series of articles on nuclear waste cleanup, published at Miller-McCune.com, the online community of the Miller-McCune Center for Research, Media and Public Policy. Mr. Power is also author of *America's Nuclear Wasteland (2008)*.

January 28 – February 2, 2009

Part One: Stewing Over Nuclear Weapon Leftovers

What it will take to clean up the mess left by the nuclear arms race.

<http://www.miller-mccune.com/article/stewing-over-nuclear-weapon-leftovers>

Part Two: Tradeoffs Abound in Nuclear Waste Cleanup

Analysis: Waste disposal after decades of nuclear weapon production will require taking risks.

<http://www.miller-mccune.com/article/tradeoffs-abound-in-nuclear-waste-cleanup-959>

Part Three: The Three Pillars of Nuclear Waste Cleanup

Analysis: Openness, accountability and trust can lead to effective actions to reduce present and future risks.

<http://www.miller-mccune.com/article/the-three-pillars-of-nuclear-waste-cleanup-966>