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Alliance for Nuclear Accountability DC Days 2009 Fact Sheet
Securing Our Future: A Nuclear-Free World

Securing Our Future:

Cleaning Up the Nuclear Weapons Legacy

DOE SHOULD MEET LEGAL AGREEMENTS

More than six decades of U.S. nuclear weapons research, testing, and production activities have left dozens of Department of Energy (DOE) sites polluted with massive amounts of radioactive and hazardous wastes. Most DOE sites are now on the Superfund list of the nation's most environmentally dangerous facilities. Their contamination threatens millions of people living near the sites or along major waste transportation routes. Some of the nation's most important water resources are endangered.

Since 1996, DOE's Environment Management (EM) program has spent more than $80 billion. As a result, some sites, including Rocky Flats (CO) and Fernald (OH), have been partially cleaned up. But ongoing monitoring is required at such sites because substantial contamination remains, precluding residential or commercial activities. In its 2009 Budget Request, DOE estimated that an additional $225 billion may be needed to finish all cleanup projects – about $100 billion more than the 2008 estimates. Further, several sites that were to be completed by 2035 are now delayed to 2040 or even decades later. In its January 2009 Report to Congress, EM estimates the remaining costs to be $205 billion to $260 billion.

"ACCELERATED CLEANUP" FAILED TO SAVE MONEY OR MEET LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

In 2002, DOE proclaimed that its "Top-to-Bottom Review" and resulting "accelerated cleanup" would streamline the EM program and reduce risks. The FY 2004 Budget Request stated: "EM believes it can achieve greater than $50 billion in life-cycle savings, and is committed to a stretch goal of $100 billion" and would have all sites cleaned up by 2035. Rather than decreasing costs, "Accelerated Cleanup" has added tens of billions in increased costs.

Moreover, the Budget Requests were not sufficient to meet all of the nation's cleanup agreements with states and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). When DOE fails to meet obligations under the agreements, it faces fines. More important, contamination often continues to spread.

Rather than accelerating cleaning, the most contaminated sites face lengthy delays. Idaho National Lab, Nevada Test Site, Paducah (KY), and Savannah River Site (SC) now will not be completed until after 2035. Portsmouth (OH) has been delayed to as late as 2052. Hanford (WA) could be as late as 2062. Those delays represent fundamental failures in meeting legal milestones and the DOE's own "Performance Management Plans." Congress and the

Recommendations

- Provide sufficient funding for environmental cleanup to assure compliance with all law, cleanup agreements, and legacy management requirements.
- Maintain a publicly accessible database showing all cleanup agreement milestones and the funding needed to meet them.
- Disclose cleanup contracts, except for proprietary information.
- Bar the disposal of radioactive and chemical wastes in unlined pits and trenches.
- Pass legislation to prohibit importation of foreign "low level" waste.

new administration need to develop new plans and provide adequate funding to fulfill promises to local communities to clean up the sites.

AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT (ARRA) PROVIDES FUNDS AND TRANSPARENCY

The 2009 Stimulus Bill provided an additional $6 billion for EM cleanup programs and required transparency in how it was spent in order to increase public involvement. Secretary Steven Chu announced the EM dollars will accelerate environmental remediation work and create thousands of jobs across 12 states. Projects identified for funding will focus on accelerating cleanup of soil and groundwater, transportation and disposal of wastes, and cleaning and demolishing former weapons complex facilities. "These investments will put Americans to work while cleaning up contamination from the cold war era," said Secretary Chu. "It reflects our commitment to future generations as well as to help local economies get moving again."

The ongoing, long-term nature of cleanup at many sites can be better addressed if the "special" ARRA requirements for openness and accountability become normal EM procedures.

MORE OPENNESS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION NEEDED

DOE has yet to provide a publicly accessible database of its thousands of cleanup milestones and the budget requirements to meet them. Cleanup contracts should be publicly disclosed, except for proprietary information. Such a system would provide more transparency and accountability and result in more cost-effective cleanup. If cleanup agreements or milestones are to be re-negotiated, the specific activities and milestones to be changed should be publicly disclosed and public comment encouraged.

NEW WASTE WORSENS PROBLEMS

Many large DOE sites where cleanup activities are in progress – Livermore (CA), Los Alamos (NM), Nevada Test Site, Oak Ridge (TN), Pantex (TX), Sandia (NM), and Savannah River (SC) – are also currently involved in design, testing, and production of nuclear weapons. Those activities continue to produce radioactive and toxic waste. Even more waste would be created for decades to come by new weapons (Complex Transformation) and reprocessing of irradiated fuel (Global Nuclear Energy Partnership). As a result, cleanup would be an ever more expensive, never-ending activity.

DOE alleges that it need not comply with Washington State's prohibition on disposing additional waste until existing waste is cleaned up. DOE continues to dump waste in unlined pits and trenches, creating the need for additional cleanup in the future.

Private nuclear waste company Energy Solutions, is even proposing to import 20,000 tons of Italian nuclear waste, process it at Oak Ridge, and dispose of it in Utah, using up finite domestic capacity available for DOE cleanup at the only low-level site available to 36 states.

LEGACY MANAGEMENT MUST FULFILL ITS COMMITMENTS

DOE sites declared "closed" and administered by the Office of Legacy Management still have continuing requirements for funding and public involvement. Budgets of hundreds of millions of dollars annually for decades to come are needed for worker pensions, ongoing monitoring, public information, and community participation at dozens of sites.