

## WEST VALLEY

### **Task force to seek more cleanup funds**

**By Kathy Kellogg CATTARAUGUS CORRESPONDENT**

**Updated: 03/01/08 6:54 AM**

ASHFORD — The West Valley Demonstration Project Citizen Task Force will draft a letter seeking support for additional federal funds in an attempt to speed cleanup and containment of some trouble spots on the site of the former commercial nuclear fuels reprocessing facility.

The project's 2008 budget is \$55.4 million, or about half the amount appropriated at the height of the "vitrification" project, when about 600,000 gallons of high-level radioactive waste were turned into glass logs.

Work in 2007 was funded at the \$75 million level, but the 2009 White House budget proposal holds \$59 million for West Valley, an amount requested by the Department of Energy (DOE) to carry on scheduled operations under a 46-month, \$160 million contract with West Valley Environmental Services. The 2009 budget will see Congressional action in the fall.

Bryan Bower, the Department of Energy's director for the project, detailed for members of the task force meeting Wednesday a list of tasks scheduled during the 2008 fiscal year under the DOE's accelerated "Way Ahead" cleanup efforts. One of those is completion of a draft decommissioning environmental impact statement for public review by late summer or early fall.

Workers continue to process some wastes for packaging and shipping, but the highest-level radioactive wastes cannot be removed until Yucca Mountain or some other suitable storage site has been approved. Also ongoing are preparations needed for the eventual demolition of the main plant process building, with preparations under way for eventual demolition of 11 other structures and demolition of nine outdoor storage areas.

Bower said several items have been added to the project's work docket for 2008, with the approval of \$20 million in additional funds. This will pay for development of future work plans on the highly radioactive underground storage tanks and their vault-drying system, and for constructing a cap and barrier wall to prevent groundwater and surface water from seeping through radioactive wastes stored in a federal burial ground.

Funds will also cover sampling of the North Plateau Groundwater Plume, which is seeping into the ground from the main plant process building and contains strontium 90 and other high-level radioactive waste. The task force successfully pressed the DOE to include containment and further investigation of the plume within the environmental

impact statement, but Bower told members that funds will not be included in the 2009 budget to cover the cost of needed investigations, along with an estimated \$3 million needed for construction of an underground slurry wall to contain the plume.

Paul Bembia, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's director at the site, urged the task force members to press lawmakers for additional funds in the 2009 budget to contain the worrisome plume and take care of other problem areas on the site.

"The budget should not go from a \$70 million or \$80 million funding level down to the \$50s without this group saying something about it," Bembia said.

Most of the task force members agreed a letter to the local congressional delegation should point out that funding levels should not continue to drop. The letter will be drafted before the next task force meeting in March.



Another Voice / Energy policy

## With a safe repository, nuclear power is an answer

By Alan J. Steinberg

Updated: 03/10/08 6:31 AM

In the ongoing discourse and state legislative stirrings related to climate change, greenhouse gas emissions and the consumption of fossil fuels, many participants in the debate have lost sight of the potential of one of our most viable alternative fuel sources — nuclear power.

In 1979, two events — the movie “The China Syndrome” and the accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear energy facility in Pennsylvania — created widespread grave doubts as to the safety of nuclear power. Today, however, nearly three decades removed from those experiences, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has very clearly instituted and maintained safeguards that provide a time-tested, superior level of safety and security.

Nuclear energy is not only safe, it is also green. Nuclear reactors do not produce greenhouse gases or combustion byproducts, and they actually emit less radiation than coal-fired plants. In fact, the majority of their environmental impact consists of the radioactive waste they produce, and therein lies the “rub” for us in the environmental business, as Hamlet might suggest.

A plan to place our nation’s high-level nuclear waste at the U.S. Department of Energy’s Yucca Mountain, Nevada, radioactive waste repository was recently effectively put on hold, waiting for its operators to prepare an application to the NRC for an operating license.

Also, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency currently is considering regulations establishing health and safety standards for the Yucca facility. If the Yucca Mountain repository receives a license from the NRC and complies with the final EPA regulations, then it could constitute the solution for our nation’s high-level radioactive waste.

A safe repository is a vital component of the nuclear energy mix because quite apart from any future

expansion of the use of nuclear power, we still need to provide a disposal option for the 104 commercial reactors currently operating in the United States. Ten of those reactors exist in our region.

Our national electricity demand is expected to increase by 50 percent in the next 30 years. The NRC has estimated that to meet that demand, we would need 50 more nuclear reactors just to maintain the same 20 percent of electric power that is currently generated by nuclear energy. So whether you are for or against the expansion of nuclear power, a safe, long-term repository is critically needed.

It is unrealistic to expect wind and solar energy to completely replace coal-fired utility plants. We need to follow Europe's example and re-energize our nuclear energy program. Nuclear power supplies about 80 percent of France's electricity demand, as an example. First, however, we must resolve the high-level nuclear waste issue. The Yucca Mountain repository can be a solution to this thorny problem, provided that it meets important health and safety standards.

*Alan J. Steinberg is administrator of Region 2 of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.*

---

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.buffalonews.com/opinion/anothervoice/story/295589.html>

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) |

[Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© 2008 The Buffalo News.

# NRCs Klein: Low-Level Waste Presents Significant Future Challenges

3/10/2008

Finding places to store the nation's low-level radioactive waste (LLW) will present "significant" challenges in the future, while plans to store high-level waste at Nevada's Yucca Mountain face such budgetary challenges that regulators may need "policy redirection" from Congress, the nation's top nuclear regulator told waste experts last month.

"Let me emphasize," U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman Dale Klein said at February's Waste Management Conference in Phoenix, "that I don't foresee any kind of immediate crisis in the disposal of LLW. But now is the time to get things in place so we can avoid a crisis in the future."

In October, NRC finished a first-in-a-decade assessment of its low-level waste (LLW) regulatory program, prompted partly by the pending closure of the Barnwell low-level radioactive waste repository in South Carolina. The review analyzed 20 activities NRC could undertake to improve low-level waste programs, many of them suggested by interest groups during public hearings on the topic.

NRC is working on several fronts to ensure sufficient storage space for low-level waste, particularly at a time when Class B and C wastes are increasing in volume. *Example:* The agency recently asked states to review revisions to its guidelines on the extended interim storage for fuel-cycle facilities and materials licensees.

It's also reviewing — and soon could endorse — guidelines prepared by the Electric Power Research Institute for nuclear utilities. If NRC staff finds the guidance acceptable, the commissioners will endorse it in a Regulatory Issue Summary.

The fact that more than half of the nation's operating nuclear power plants have received, or are applying for, 20-year license renewals has delayed the massive decommissionings that might have produced enormous increases in the amount of low-level waste requiring disposal right away.

"But, of course, life extensions just kick the can down the road," Klein warned. "Even with another round of license renewals giving plants life extensions beyond 60 years, we would still have to confront the immense challenge of decommissioning waste when these plants eventually cease operations.

Addressing another question on the minds of industry leaders, Klein said that, while NRC is not now proposing a new "waste confidence" review, it might consider a future review if some factors come into play.

*Example:* NRC might consider a new rulemaking, Klein said, if any fuel from new reactors warrants possible changes to waste-confidence findings, or if its expectations regarding a timeline for a

permanent repository should be modified or updated.

In its first waste-confidence decision, issued nearly 25 years ago, NRC concluded that it had “reasonable assurance” that safe disposal of high-level waste and spent fuel in a geologic repository was technically feasible; that such a repository would eventually be available; and that the waste could be managed safely until the repository opened.

Subsequent reviews reaffirmed those findings, although some interest groups have pressed NRC to revisit the issue in light of the long-delayed opening of the proposed high-level waste depository the Energy Department (DoE) is building at Yucca Mountain.

“Last year, we asked the staff to prepare a memo on this point,” Klein said. “Those would be nice clarifications to have. But for the commission to decide that there is a real need for a new rulemaking would depend on whether the circumstances have significantly changed; for example, if there were some new legislation or policy direction from Congress.”

Clearly, however, things have changed with regard to Yucca project, Klein said. Congress’s decisions to reduce funding for the project have hampered DoE’s goal of submitting a Yucca license application to NRC by this summer.

“DoE has said that it is still on track to submit the application this year,” Klein said, “but of course, that would only be the first step. We would need to carefully assess the DoE application and seek additional information that might be necessary. And, of course, we are anticipating extensive adjudicatory hearings on the application. All that seems to be complicated, however, by the severe budget cuts in the Yucca Mountain program.”

Noting that DoE and NRC are still required under congressional mandate to pursue Yucca as the nation’s final resting spot for spent fuel and other high-level wastes, Klein said “it is not entirely clear to me what Congress expects us to do.”

“NRC and DoE ... seem to be in the position of having inadequate funds to meet their statutory obligations within the expected timeframes,” Klein said. “It would seem that we need some clarification of Congress’s expectations under these circumstances, and, in particular, some kind of budgetary relief or policy redirection.”

---

Capitol Press, LLC . 7600 Leesburg Pike . West Building Suite 300 . Falls Church, VA 22043 .  
800.248.6426

## Funding Cuts Jeopardize Cleanup Of Nuclear Waste Sites

ScienceDaily (Mar. 10, 2008) — The Federal Government may need at least 20 years longer than previously planned -- and an additional \$50 billion -- to clean up radioactive and hazardous wastes at nuclear weapons sites, according to an article "DOE Falling Behind in Cleanups" scheduled for the March 10 issue of Chemical & Engineering News.

The article, written by C&EN Senior Editor Jeff Johnson, cites a new U. S. Department of Energy (DOE) audit of its operations estimating that clean-up costs may reach \$305 billion at about 25 sites where nuclear weapons materials were manufactured.

That's more than \$50 billion above the Bush Administration's earlier estimate. The audit also indicates that it may take until 2062 to finish the cleanup job, over 20 years longer than originally scheduled.

Still, the clean-up budget proposed this year by the Bush Administration is \$5.5 billion, one of the lowest since the massive remediation effort began in the 1980s.

The budget cuts may be particularly hard felt at large cleanup sites such as Washington State's Hanford Nuclear Site, the most contaminated nuclear site in the country, the article suggests. Some officials fear that the cuts could delay cleanup of Hanford and other sites indefinitely.

*Adapted from materials provided by [American Chemical Society](#), via [EurekAlert!](#), a service of AAAS.*

# Cleanup of nuclear weapons sites is behind schedule and over budget, audit shows, but DOE cuts program

[JEFF JOHNSON](#)

**OPTIMISTIC MILESTONES** in cleaning up the nuclear weapons complex cannot be met, the [Department of Energy](#) recently announced. With much fanfare, the Bush Administration set milestones just a few years ago. Now, DOE must begin renegotiating agreements reached with states to reflect new and more accurate costs and schedules revealed last year in a program-wide audit, says Assistant Secretary James A. Rispoli, who manages the agency's cleanup program.



Fluor Hanford

**DIGGING OUT** Hanford workers remove drums of radioactive waste from burial ground.

The audit shows that the cost to clean up extensive radioactive and hazardous waste contamination is likely to be as high as \$305 billion, more than \$50 billion higher than the Administration's earlier estimate. It also may take until 2062 to finish the job—more than 20 years longer than original estimates. Yet this year's cleanup budget proposal is \$5.5 billion, the lowest level in the last 15 years for the huge cleanup program.

Former energy secretary Spencer Abraham set the earlier milestones in 2002 as part of his "accelerated cleanup plan." The plan was based on a top-to-bottom review of the overall cleanup program, Abraham said at the time.

In 2002, Abraham said: "When I became energy secretary, a little more than a year ago today, I was presented with the old plan for cleaning up our sites, which called for a timetable of some 70 years to complete and at a cost of \$300 billion. That is not good enough for me, and I doubt

it is good enough for anyone who lives near these sites."

Abraham then announced his new plan to cut the program by at least \$50 billion and to complete cleanups at nearly all sites by 2035. His plan required state and local officials where the contaminated sites are located to agree to accelerate cleanups and in return the state would receive adequate funding. At the time, some local officials called the plan "blackmail" and complained that cleanup standards would be lowered in return for receiving funds for the cleanup. But they went along and revised their cleanup plans ([C&EN, March 25, 2002, page 12](#)).

Now, in the Bush Administration's final year, cleanup schedules and costs for most sites are back where they were when the Administration took office.



NAPA

**SHORT-STAFFED** A recent report by the National Academy of Public Administration found that DOE needs up to six times more cleanup staff. Shown are Rispoli (left) and NAPA's Jonathan Breul at the report release briefing ([C&EN, Jan. 7, page 20](#)).

**FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS**, people living near some 100 sites where U.S. nuclear weapons materials had been manufactured have complained of contamination and health hazards from radioactive and hazardous waste left at the sites. Progress has been made, but cleanups at the largest and most complicated sites, such as Hanford in Washington, Savannah River in South Carolina, and Idaho National Laboratory, have plodded along. Cleanup of these sites is highly complex technologically, and the sites are extremely expensive to remediate. Their cleanup schedules remain many decades away from completion.

Rispoli brought the bad news to a national meeting of the Energy Community Alliance, an organization of elected officials living in communities near the sites, on Feb. 22. But the news wasn't all bad, Rispoli stressed to the disappointed officials. He pointed out that the Bush

Administration's cleanup program had reduced the number of sites to 24. In particular, he singled out completed cleanups at three former weapons sites: Rocky Flats site in Colorado and Fernald and Miamisburg sites in Ohio.

However, the 24 sites that remain on the list are the thorniest and by far the most expensive cleanups.

Rispoli blamed the need to negotiate new milestones on "incomplete knowledge of the cleanup's complexity, inconsistent performance on technical issues, and risks that materialized and had not been allowed for. There were overly optimistic assumptions and barriers that no one saw."

"State regulators are not happy," Rispoli acknowledged. Over the years many states have signed agreements with DOE and the Environmental Protection Agency that include cleanup milestones. Many of these milestones must be renegotiated, he said, because they cannot be reached with the budget just proposed by the Bush Administration.

"I believe because we have solid relationships with regulators, and because we now have independent audits, we will be able to work with regulators to shuffle priorities to determine what goes and what stays," Rispoli said. "Not all milestones are created equal."

Rispoli would not identify the milestones that can't be met, saying DOE is just beginning to discuss them with state officials. He said, however, that some 25 specific milestones are in jeopardy.

States are not likely to go along quietly. A week ago, Washington Gov. [Christine Gregoire](#) (D) threatened to sue over missed milestones after a meeting with Energy Secretary Samuel W. Bodman. Gregoire had been state attorney general when the earlier agreements were reached.

At the least, states and local communities will lean hard on their federal congressional delegations to restore cleanup funds cut by the Administration.

This latest reassessment joins a long run of revised cleanup plans stretching back to the start of the cleanup program in the late 1980s. This most recent revision is unique because this Administration is rejecting its own estimates, rather than those of its predecessor, which has been the usual case.

"I think I heard that speech 10 years ago," said a participant at the Feb. 22 meeting. Several local officials warned that the time extension and reduced budget make it more likely that big

sites like Hanford, whose cleanup is estimated to cost one-third of the \$305 billion and take the longest time, will be simply fenced off and never cleaned up.



Jeff Johnson/C&EN

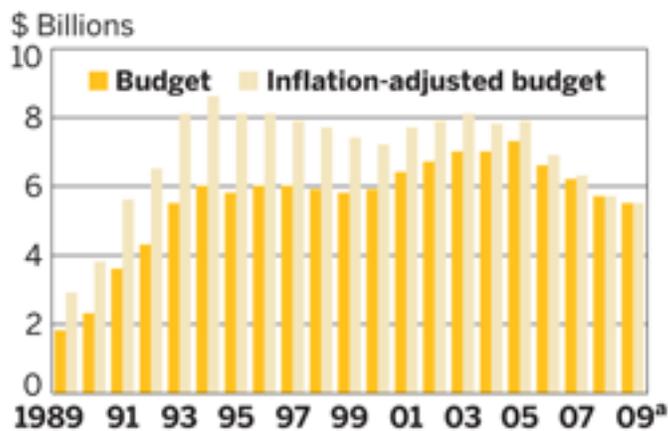
Larsen

"We have seen this coming," said Pamela Brown Larsen, executive director of [Hanford Communities](#), a coalition of cities bordering the site. "Although a lot is getting done at Hanford, the problem is that the minimum safe-level costs are so high. Just keeping the lights on and keeping everybody safe is expensive," she said, speaking about the facility's 177 old underground storage tanks filled with 53 million gal of radioactive and hazardous wastes, the miles and miles of piping, and thousands of valves. The program to treat these tank wastes has been long stalled, and Larsen noted, "We don't want them to build new, safer tanks because that means they will never treat the waste."

**ALTHOUGH HANFORD** would get nearly \$2 billion in the budget proposal, Larsen said that that amount will only contain the waste and maintain the site. Another \$160 million, she said, is needed to "ensure stuff gets done." This fact underscores the expense associated with containing the waste versus cleaning it up.

## DOE CLEANUP SPENDING

As problems grew, so did spending, but as quick solutions fade, spending declines



SOURCE: CH2M Hill

"Hanford was promised that if Rocky Flats and Fernald were speeded up and closed, the funds they got would go to Hanford," Larsen said. "But that has not been true. DOE forgets that it signed agreements with the states, and elected officials consider these valid deals." Still, she hopes Washington State chooses not to sue. "We know the state government is frustrated, but if it pursues litigation, everything will slip into a quagmire and no work will get done."

Rispoli wasn't around when the accelerated plans were negotiated in 2002, she noted, and now he has his own priorities. Larsen then rattled off the names of past heads of DOE's cleanup programs, each of whom reviewed the program and came up with a new cleanup plan.

"In January, we will get another Rispoli," Larsen added, "and who knows what his plan will be."

The Administration proposed an overall \$1 billion increase for DOE compared with last year, Larsen noted. "I am glad the science budget is up and more money is being spent for renewable energy, but I know it had to come from somewhere, and I wish it wasn't from us."

- [Email this article to a friend](#)
- [Print this article](#)
- [E-mail the editor](#)

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

Another Voice / Environment

## Producing nuclear energy is anything but green

By Judith Einach

Updated: 03/22/08 6:40 AM

Government administrators and industry loyalists call nuclear power a green alternative. They fail to admit that the entire fuel cycle, including mining and milling uranium, producing fuel rods, building nuclear power plants and dealing with nuclear wastes is anything but green. These processes use so much fossil fuel that the words describing the amount are outside our common vocabulary.

Nuclear power is the most dangerous way to boil water. Nuclear fission produces heat that boils water that in turn powers generators that produce electricity. Everything leading up to and following that process is fossil fuel intensive or a threat to health and safety.

That ugly word “reprocessing,” associated with extraction of usable weapons- grade uranium and plutonium from nuclear wastes, is now “recycling.” The industry claims untested technology will “recycle” some of the wastes by turning them into reusable material to produce more nuclear power. Let’s hope so because there is a limited amount of uranium and only some of it is suitable for energy production.

Green is supposed to mean sustainable. Nuclear power relies on a limited resource that will disappear faster as more nations build more reactors. In the wake of nuclear energy production we find horrible environmental damage that no one willingly takes responsibility for. What color is this?

Western New Yorkers ought to be especially conscious of the devastation caused by nuclear waste. The West Valley nuclear site near Buffalo houses this nation’s most complex mix of nuclear and hazardous wastes. The site is governed by a federal statute that requires the high-level wastes be moved to a national repository.

Yucca Mountain is the only site under consideration. But if Yucca opened tomorrow, the wastes stored in West Valley would not move to the front of the queue for 40 years. By then, it is expected Yucca will be full.

Yet every day more nuclear wastes are created. With the push to expand nuclear power there will be even more wastes with improper storage, monitoring and maintenance. Where in the world can all these wastes go? Where do we put the rubble from demolished nuclear plants and waste sites? There are no answers and no political will to resolve the problems.

Nuclear power is neither reliable nor economical. It produces base-load power, lacking the flexibility to meet peak demand. It's dangerous to power up a nuclear plant quickly. Without this flexibility, nuclear power is primarily useful during the night when there is little demand for electricity.

Nuclear plants depend on fresh water to cool reactors. We see water diversions in the South taking water from people and thirsty crops to avoid a nuclear plant meltdown. Nuclear power has huge negatives, yet \$150 billion of taxpayer money was given to the nuclear industry. The choice to do this is about power, not about green energy.

*Judith Einach is director of the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes.*

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.buffalonews.com/opinion/anothervoice/story/305156.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© 2008 The Buffalo News.



## Reynolds declines to run

Area's key Republican representative ends decades of state, federal service

Updated: 03/25/08 6:34 AM

Word that Rep. Thomas M. Reynolds will not seek a sixth term representing a chunk of Western New York in Congress is news across the nation, not just in his home towns of Springville and Clarence.

The lawmaker who was once considered on the inside track to becoming speaker of the House is among 22 House Republicans who are stepping down this year. With three other Republicans giving up House seats to seek other offices and four more having already left office during this Congress, Reynolds might have found himself a little lonely even if he had sought, and won, re-election.

Reynolds was his typical optimistic self Thursday when he formally announced his retirement from the House. He expressed confidence that he could have won re-election, and confidence that he will be replaced by a fellow Republican.

But Reynolds' decision to pack it in and finally get to know his grandchildren is being widely read as an admission of political weakness — his own and his party's. But it's also possible — perhaps most likely — to simply take him at his word.

It certainly might not have been a pleasant prospect for Reynolds, once among the highest and mightiest in the Capitol, to suffer another close race of the kind he sweated out two years ago and, even if he won, return to a House where the Democrats have firmed up their control and frozen him still further out. And no one should be faulted just because he doesn't have the drive to stay in Congress for dozens of years. Ten can be enough for anyone.

And it would have been a bruising campaign. By virtue of his leadership posts, Reynolds stood in proximity to a couple of minor scandals, most recently an alleged embezzlement by a staffer from a campaign fund Reynolds was nominally in charge of. That at least caught him up in the wider continuing public mistrust of all incumbents.

Reynolds rose quickly in the House hierarchy and, while he was there, worked hard on some issues of importance to his constituents. Important among them were fighting off the day when the Alternative Minimum Tax reached beyond its targeted super-rich households and started whacking more and more middle-class homes, and his yeoman efforts in securing and protecting funding for the **West Valley nuclear wastes cleanup project**. As he demonstrated clearly in the aftermath of the 2006 October Surprise storm that added some rebound to his last difficult election campaign, he has a solid record of delivering for his district.

And Reynolds also boldly stood up to the bureaucrats of the Department of Homeland Security — an agency run by his fellow Republicans — to denounce the excessive requirements and delays that have been slapped on those crossing the U.S.-Canadian border since 9/11. Soon, Tom Reynolds will cross a border of his own, back to the status of private citizen. We wish him well in that transition, after a long record of state and federal public service.

---

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.buffalonews.com/opinion/editorials/story/307210.html>

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) |

[Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© 2008 The Buffalo News.