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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

West Valley decommissioning study scheduled to be released in December

By Kathy Kellogg CATTARAUGUS CORRESPONDENT

Updated: 09/29/08 7:06 AM

ASHFORD — The Department of Energy is on track for the December release of its Draft Environmental Impact Study for the Decommissioning and/or Long-Term Stewardship at the West Valley Demonstration Project.

The study is an overhauled version of a draft issued in 1996 but never finalized.

Department of Energy staffers provided more details last week about the 13-month timeline for completion of the study. Public comments close in June, and replies to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's requests for additional information are allowed through October 2009, followed by a final draft in November 2009 and a final decision in December 2009.

Another component of the process is a smaller Phase 1 Decommissioning Plan to be issued in December, containing technical information on the levels of radiation and dose modeling and how it will be measured.

According to Decommissioning Plan project manager Moira Maloney, the public may view this document, but it will not be part of the public comment process and is not subject to the same National Environmental Policy Act review of the impact study.

She said meetings between the DOE and NRC will be open to the public and NRC notes will be published on the agency's Web site, with the possibility of a webcast of an October meeting when radiological dose modeling will be discussed.

“Phase 1 Decommissioning will achieve the unrestricted release criteria,” said Maloney, referring to a scenario in one of the cleanup alternatives that would allow unrestricted uses of the site in the future that will not require fencing, deed restrictions or other controls on the property. That level is 25 millirems per year.

Maloney also told the group that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will issue a Technical Evaluation Report on dosage in response to the Decommissioning Plan, which will also be available to the public but will be appended to the final decision and will not be a part of the final impact study.

West Valley Citizen Task Force members questioned the parallel documents and lack of public comment on the Decommissioning Plan, complaining that the Technical Evaluation Report should be made available at an earlier stage as part of the impact study. But DOE officials replied that the Decommissioning Plan and impact study serve different purposes.

“This is a process the NRC has [set up for DOE] for meeting unrestricted release,” said Bryan Bower of DOE, describing the Decommissioning Plan as having a different purpose than the impact study and that it is a conservative document.

John Chamberlain of DOE said the NRC’s return of the Technical Evaluation Report to the DOE coinciding with the issuance of a final decision will provide a framework for the DOE to prove the unrestricted release criteria has been met after the work is done.

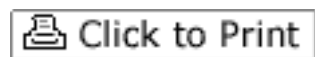
The impact study will present four alternatives for the wastes now at West Valley: sitewide removal, sitewide close-in-place, no action and the DOE’s preferred alternative, phased decommissioning.

During discussion about the impact study, task force members pointed out that a standard 45-day public comment period might be in effect instead of the longer six-month timeframe if that issue had not been part of the 1987 stipulation requiring an EIS and setting the West Valley Coalition on Nuclear Waste’s lawsuit against DOE.

Currently, workers are reducing the site footprint by packaging up and shipping out some of the structures and least dangerous materials on the site under a contract set to end in 2011.

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EPA issues radiation exposure rules for Yucca dump

By H. JOSEF HEBERT – 13 hours ago

WASHINGTON (AP) — No one knows what the Earth will be like in a million years. But a proposed nuclear waste dump in Nevada must be designed to ensure that people living near it then are exposed to no more than 100 millirems of radiation annually — equivalent to about a half-dozen X-rays.

And over the next 10,000 years, radiation exposure to the waste dump's neighbors may be no more than 15 millirems a year, which is about what people get from an ordinary X-ray. People receive about 350 millirems a year of radiation on average from all background sources.

After three years of deliberations, the Environmental Protection Agency on Tuesday announced its radiation health standard for the proposed Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository, a proposed system of underground caverns 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas where the government hopes to keep highly radioactive commercial and military nuclear waste.

It is scheduled to open in 2020 if a license application is approved by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The EPA has struggled to comply with a 2004 court directive that said it must establish a radiation health standard for a million years into the future because some of the isotopes in the buried waste will remain extremely dangerous for that long. An earlier standard of only 10,000 years was ruled inadequate by the court.

The agency said Tuesday it believes its latest standard is "consistent" with the recommendations of the National Academy of Sciences and is expected to satisfy the court decision.

The Energy Department last June submitted its license request for the Yucca Mountain dump to the NRC, which has three years to consider the request. Despite strong opposition from Nevada officials, the Bush administration hopes the site can be opened by 2020.

It is designed to hold 77,700 tons of used reactor fuel from commercial nuclear power plants in 31 states. The Energy Department recently estimated a cost of \$96.2 billion of building and operating it for 150 years, beyond its expected closure date of 2113.

The EPA said that in submitting its design for a license, the Energy Department must consider the effects of climate change, earthquakes and volcanic activities as well as the corrosion of the waste packages to assure it can meet the radiation exposure requirements over a million years.

Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman has said he is confident that the license application submitted to the NRC will "stand up to any challenges anywhere," including questions about whether the design will be adequate to meet the EPA's radiation exposure standard to nearby residents.

Rep. Ed Markey, D-Mass., said the EPA announcement, coming four months after the Yucca application was sent to the NRC, "only reinforces how their entire approach to the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste project has put politics and the financial health of the nuclear industry ahead of science and the health of the public."

Markey said the Energy Department should withdraw the application and resubmit it after the radiation exposure requirements are taken into account.

Kevin Kamps, of the anti-nuclear watchdog group "Beyond Nuclear," called the 100 millirem threshold far too lax. He said it would allow "future generations to be exposed to significantly higher doses of harmful radiation" than people living near nuclear power plants today.

The NRC's primary job will be to determine whether the proposed design will protect public health and meet the EPA radiation standard. The NRC has proposed a less stringent radiation standard. And the EPA itself had a maximum exposure of 350 millirems per year for the 10,000-to-1-million-year time frame, more than three times the exposure level it

announced Tuesday.

On the Net:

- Environmental Protection Agency: <http://www.epa.gov>

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Nuclear power is not environmentally sound

Updated: 10/07/08 6:35 AM

Doug Turner argues that politicians opposing a nuclear waste repository inside Yucca Mountain contribute to our nation's energy woes. Advocating increased use of nuclear power, Turner references the French, who are heavy producers of electricity generated by nuclear power plants. He claims their nuclear power is cheap, profitable and environmentally sound. The French pave their highways with material in which they mix radioactive wastes, spreading the hazard across the land. They store radioactive waste in facilities along miles of coastline. Radioactivity leaks into the ocean. Reprocessing creates more waste than there was before the material was reprocessed. But discarding weapons-grade plutonium and uranium would be economically irresponsible.

Those 275 canisters of high-level waste stored in West Valley are not, as Turner maintains, on railroad cars waiting for Yucca to open. They wait in the process building behind 4-foot-thick walls. These canisters, the total 30 million curies of radioactivity on the West Valley site and the remains of the Manhattan Project strewn around Erie and Niagara counties, are perfect examples of a political attitude that allows places to become sacrifice zones. The equivalent of funding a month of the war in Iraq could rid our region of our immediate nuclear threat. Nothing about nuclear material is cheap, profitable or environmentally sound.

Judith Einach

Director, Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes

ORCHARD PARK

Railroad hopes to abandon 28-mile track to W. Valley

By **Fred O. Williams** NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Updated: **10/16/08 8:07 AM**

The Orchard Park Train Depot is a historic building, but the track in front of it could be history.

The Buffalo & Pittsburgh Railroad plans to abandon an unused, 28-mile stretch of track that runs from Orchard Park to West Valley.

The railroad could begin pulling up the track for salvage as early as next month, if the abandonment is approved by federal regulators.

The move is a boon for advocates of turning the route into a public trail. The state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation has filed a rail-to-trail request, to keep the corridor from being split up and returned to private ownership.

“The rail corridor . . . would make an excellent recreational trail, and conversion of the property to trail use is widely supported throughout the area,” Erik Kulleseid, deputy commissioner for Open Space Protection, said in the state’s filing with the federal Surface Transportation Board.

A meeting about the multiuse trail idea in July drew supporters who hope the rail bed could become like the Pat McGee Trail in Cattaraugus County, which is used for hiking, bicycling and snowmobiling. That trail runs from the Village of Cattaraugus to the City of Salamanca.

But for rail buffs, the loss of the tracks would be an aesthetic blow for the depot in Orchard Park, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. It would also mean the end of the line for hopes of a tourist train there someday.

“It would just be devastating to us to lose the track,” said Robert Snyder, chairman of the Depot

Committee of the Western New York Railway Historical Society.

The depot was built in 1911 by the Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh Railroad, whose president, Harry Yates, lived in Orchard Park. The building now serves as an office of the railway society.

The group hopes to preserve a two-mile section of track north of the depot to keep it connected to rails that remain in use. The rail company is considering the request but isn't making any promises.

"We're always willing to work with a group like that," spokesman Michael Williams said. "But at the end of the day, we have a business to run."

The Buffalo & Pittsburgh filed a petition with the Surface Transportation Board on Sept. 16, proposing to abandon the line Nov. 5. The railroad is a unit of Genesee & Wyoming Inc., based in Greenwich, Conn.

Affected would be 27.6 miles of track, running from a point just north of the Village of Orchard Park to West Valley in Cattaraugus County. In Erie County, the line crosses through parts of Aurora, Colden and Concord. The track hasn't been used since 1997.

Operations will continue from Buffalo to a point north of the abandoned section of track, maintaining freight service to customers 84 Lumber and Electro-Abrasives, Williams said. However, the line has had discussions with customers about halting service on this segment in the future because of low business volume, he added.

The railway also would continue to serve the West Valley Nuclear Demonstration Project, using tracks south of the abandoned segment.

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• 2008 The Buffalo News.

October 17, 2008

Nuke fuel recycling plan finds backing

Federal agency endorses concept, but not method or reprocessing site

By *Tim Smith*
CAPITAL BUREAU

COLUMBIA -- A U.S. Department of Energy study supports the nation moving to a recycled commercial nuclear fuel system but does not choose a method or a site for the reprocessing.

South Carolina's Savannah River Site, currently the location of a controversial program to convert weapons-grade plutonium into commercial nuclear reactor fuel, remains a focus of the government's recycling efforts, an environmental group said on Thursday.

The 960-page study by the Department of Energy, which was posted recently on a government Web site, looked at various types of recycling methods as well as different types of nuclear power that would involve using fuel just once and then storing it in a geological repository.

The study concluded that under any alternative fuel plan, the nation has insufficient designated storage under federal law for future spent nuclear fuel or radioactive waste. Recycling would save on storage needs for spent nuclear fuel, though it may require additional storage for some types of radioactive waste, the study found.

Any reprocessing plan would cost hundreds of billions of dollars and take many years to implement, said an official with the environmental group, Friends of the Earth.

"We are pleased to see that DOE has heard the growing concern about the idea of spent fuel reprocessing and stopped far short of naming the Savannah River Site as a focus of this misguided program," said Tom Clements, Southeastern nuclear campaign coordinator for Friends of the Earth. "SRS remains the prime target for this dangerous scheme, which will meet great resistance."

Reprocessing plants have been halted or run into serious problems in Europe, Clements said. One commercial reprocessing facility operated at West Valley, N.Y., from 1966-1972 and the site is still being cleaned up after an expenditure of billions of dollars, he said.

"Reprocessing is a costly and dangerous scheme that would place the environment of South Carolina at risk, and research into it must cease under a new administration," Clements said. "Reprocessing could only survive with massive government handouts and would contribute to the continued economic decline of our country, while being a net energy drain."

The government plans to hold 13 meetings nationwide to allow public comment. The only Southeast meeting will be at 7 p.m. Dec. 4 at Aiken Technical College in Graniteville.

West Valley Support Group attracts new members

By NATALIE CONDOR-SMITH
Journal Correspondent

There were many new faces at the third meeting of the West Valley Nuclear Compensation Support Group which was held on Friday, Sept. 19 at the Concord Town Hall in Springville.

Anyone who is a current employee, former employee, employee of a contractor or subcontractor, surviving members of employees, contractors or subcontractors who worked at the West Valley facility is not only encouraged to join the group, but is urged to. The reason? At stake is a possible \$150,000 lump sum of federal money designated as compensation and medical expenses for workers who contracted certain diseases as a result of exposure to beryllium or radiation.

Filing a claim is not easy. Once a claim has been filed, a claimant has 30 days in which to obtain a myriad of documentation, also not an easy task, since many records allegedly either do not exist, or have been destroyed or lost. In addition, there has to be a 50 percent or more reasonable belief that the cancer can be traced to exposure to radiation. According to many group members who have filed claims, the formula used to decide the percentage of such exposure routinely results in the middle to high 40s, thus making them ineligible for compensation.

Lori Nason, one of the group's members addressed the gathering of new members, saying, "The number 1 thing is to support each other and to network. Number 2 is to reach all the people who worked at West Valley so they can file claims. Number 3 is public awareness of what is going on."

Most of the 14 people present at the meeting were new and in turn, each briefly shared their story. Most of them spoke of the cancer or cancers they had contracted while working at the facility or soon afterwards. Everybody knows that cancer is not just a disease that strikes the elderly but one of the sad and striking things about this group of people is their age ranging from their late 20s and up. Thyroid, pancreatic, lung, and kidney cancers are the most common among the group which also includes widows and widowers of present and past employees and employees of contractors. One member of the group told of being pregnant when she was working in an office for 10 years at the facility and shortly after the birth of her daughter, she was diagnosed with thyroid disease. "My concern is for the nine months I was pregnant there," she said. "Is my daughter going to be affected?"

Future plans to try and reach potential claimants include creating flyers and form letters and a search for an environmental lawyer. So far, the group has been unsuccessful in finding a lawyer willing to help them. "No-one wants to go up against the government," said Nason.

Anyone who works or had worked or has a family member who works or has worked at West Valley Demonstration Project and have questions, can send an e-mail to wvncsg@yahoo.com. In addition, anyone who knows of someone who worked at the facility from the 1960s to 2002, the group asks that they encourage them to come to the meetings.