

West Valley Demonstration Project looking at options for high-level waste storage

By Jessie Owen
SPRINGVILLE JOURNAL EDITOR

On hand to update the Ashford Town Board on the current state of affairs at the West Valley Demonstration Project was New York State Energy Research and Development Authority Program Director Paul Bembia, who spoke at the board meeting held April 11.

WVDP officials said they are presently planning to have the main plant process building demolished by 2017. "A major activity that is needed to get that building down is to get the [high-level waste] canisters out of the main plant," Bembia said. "Since there is no disposal facility for HLW, [the U.S. Department of Energy] is going to construct an interim storage facility on site, where the HLW will be held until it can go to a repository."

In response to a question from a board member about a proposal to store the HLW in a New Mexico facility, Bembia replied that the business community and chamber of commerce in Carlsbad, N.M. are advocating for the WVDP waste, as well as waste from other facilities around the country, to be sent there for storage, and eventu-

ally, to its Waste Isolation Pilot Plant for disposal. The individuals in that town cite the positive economic impact of the WIPP as the reason they are in favor of having more waste sent to their area.

The WIPP repository is constructed in a deep salt bed. "Salt flows under pressure and seals around canisters, but it hasn't been tested to see how it would react to a lot of heat," Bembia said. The heat he is referring to comes off of spent fuel, a type of waste not stored at the WVDP.

The West Valley facility is currently in need of a disposal facility for its HLW and transuranic waste, a type of waste currently classified between low and high-level waste. The WIPP repository can accept transuranic waste that is classified as defense waste, but since DOE does not consider the WVDP transuranic waste to be defense waste, there is currently nowhere to dispose of it. "WIPP may be able to handle all of the nation's transuranic waste," Bembia said, but he added, that since the current law does not allow non-defense waste to be disposed at WIPP, "it would require new legislation. It's the same stuff, just designated as non-defense."

(Continued on Page 7)

WVDP high-level waste storage discussed ...

(Continued from Page 3)

"The HLW canisters will be stored in the interim storage facility on-site until a disposal alternative is found," Bembia said. The storage facility will have a design life of 50 years. The WVDP's schedule is to have those canisters moved out of the main plant process building by 2015. "The nation is re-evaluating what it will do with high-level waste," Bembia said. "In the meantime, the WVDP's HLW will remain on-site." Low-level waste from the West Valley location is being transported to both a Nevada site and to a Utah facility. Since August, 40,000 cubic feet of low-level waste have been shipped out of WVDP.

An additional, potential problem stems from a drop in funds from President Barack Obama's proposed federal budget for 2013. "In that proposed budget, the WVDP would receive only \$50 million for 2013," Bembia said. This is in contrast to last year's \$60 million, an amount that was increased to \$66.6 million through assistance from congressmen Tom Reed and Brian Higgins.

"When the department of energy estimated that it would take 10 years to finish phase 1 of the de-commissioning work, they used a planning assumption of \$75 million per year," Bembia said, adding that, with the current drop in funding, this phase could be lengthened to

20 years, with \$200 million added to the total project cost.

"I'm hearing that this is happening because the DOE is currently using a 'risk-based' approach for determining funding priorities," Bembia said. "So, as we've successfully completed our high-hazard work, the work that is left to do is of a lower priority in terms of DOE funding."

Bembia urged the Ashford Town Board members to consider contacting the DOE or the New York state congressional delegates to request increased funding for the WVDP.

In other board matters:

- "Let's clean up this town," Town Supervisor Christopher Gerwitz said, announcing that Ashford's trash pickup runs April 16 - 21.

- In response to a motion made by Councilman John Pfeffer, the town's attorney will be drafting a law that "protects everyone" in town from hydrofracking. "I'd like to see this thing done quickly," Pfeffer said.

Councilwoman Beverly Hess said that the town is trying to get a group of landowners to stand as a united front against the practice. "[The town attorney] should not have too much of a problem finding laws to go by from towns like ours," Pfeffer said.

- Rebar drawings have been re-

ceived for the Fox Valley bridge project and the concrete head wall footers' replacement should be completed by April 23. "They plan to put the pipe in as soon as it gets here," Gerwitz said, but Code Enforcement Officer Gary Perkins warned that arrival time for that pipe may take several weeks. "It's looking pretty good," Gerwitz said. "They're making progress."

- Perkins announced that the department of energy is placing air monitoring stations around the area. According to Bembia, these need to be up for one year to collect air samples before demolition at the WVDP begins.

- Pfeffer said that the newly-reactivated water committee will be meeting at least once per week to reach an agreement about the town's water district. A report will be made to the board at its next meeting.

"We have to take the emotion out of it and just look at the numbers," Board Member Charlie Davis said.

- Longtime town employee Larry Nagel will be retiring this summer and Highway Superintendent Tim Engels said that the town is accepting resumes for the truck driver labor position.

The next Ashford Town Board meeting will be held May 9 at 7:30 p.m.