

WVDP demolition plans draw questions, concerns from the state

By BRIAN ACKLEY
Journal Editor

A preliminary federal plan to decontaminate and demolish 42 buildings at the West Valley Demonstration Project over the next four years is already drawing some significant concern and questions from at least one important partner at the site.

The Department of Energy proposal, outlined in a draft Environmental Assessment report released to the public last week, categorizes the structures as "not expected, either individually or collectively, to affect long-term site management decisions," ac-

ording to the DOE, despite the fact that some of the buildings are still being utilized. The report also characterized the structures as "unnecessary and unused."

In addition, Bryan C. Bower, Acting Director of the West Valley Demonstration Project, wrote in a cover letter to the report that "the facilities which are the subject of this EA are smaller and are either free of contamination or contamination is limited in extent and/or amount."

But the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, which oversees the site for the state which actually owns the property, doesn't necessarily agree with the DOE's assessment.

"The description of the 42 buildings and other structures as 'unnecessary and unused' is not entirely accurate," NYSERDA said in four pages of written comments passed along to the DOE. The state group added that the report "appears to lack a thoughtful consideration of the consequences of removing certain facilities."

Tom Attridge, a senior project manager for NYSERDA who is stationed in West Valley, said the plan does not impact his group's possibility of a lawsuit against the DOE, which it first threatened in early April.

At that time NYSERDA Chairman Vincent Delorio noted that, "The Department of Energy has taken a very limited view of

its responsibility to clean up nuclear waste at West Valley." He went on to indicate that he felt the DOE "is cutting the budget and workforce at West Valley when there is a great deal more work to do."

"This has nothing to do with the lawsuit at all" Attridge told the Journal. "We have not filed the lawsuit, but we have been given approval by our board to do that. We are just waiting the right timing on that issue."

According to NYSERDA, 11 of the 42 structures either currently store or are approved to store low-level and low level mixed waste, meaning that should the plan

(Continued on Page 7)

Questions and concerns about WVDP plans...

(Continued from Page 1)

be enacted in its entirety, no buildings would be left that would be designated for that type of storage.

"Our perspective is it's a good thing if they are no longer needed, but we would have concerns with removing any of the buildings that could be used or needed during the final clean up of the site," Attridge added.

"The more clean up that gets done, the better off everyone is here, but let's not necessarily take down a building we might need. We've had some momentum, now it seems to be slowing down a little bit, but we'd like to see this cleanup moving forward and get completely cleaned up, not just half way."

NYSERDA officials say they believe, "that future decommissioning actions will continue to generate low-level waste and that this waste will need to be stored in preparation for off-site shipment. Any assumptions that DOE will ship radioactive wastes as they are generated, without some period of storage prior to shipment, are not supported by DOE's recent actions."

In addition, the latest DOE proposal does not address some of the most major issues confronting the cleanup operation, including what to do with buried 600,000 gallon steel tanks which at one time held high-level radioactive waste. While the state and DOE are at odds over what to do with those – the DOE wants to leave them in the ground and eventually fill them with cement – the federal Environmental Protection Agency has stepped forward in supporting the state's view of removing the containment devices all together.

This report is considered an interim step while the DOE and NYSERDA jointly prepare a final decommissioning Environmental Impact Statement which will specifically focus on alternatives for permanently shutting down the facility and identifying potential needs for long-term stewardship of the roughly five-square-mile site.

"DOE needs to eliminate or significantly reduce the functions that are undertaken in the facilities in the near term," their report concluded. "The facilities are, or within the next four years will be, no longer needed to safely monitor and maintain or support future removal of the vitrified high level waste or (are) facilities that are under consideration in the decommissioning EIS."

The department, which the federal government has charged with the oversight for cleaning up the facility and who in turns contracts out much of the work to the privately owned Washington Group International, said not demolishing the structures would mean continuing maintenance and monitoring, "resulting in unnecessary expense. DOE needs to remove these facilities for cost-efficiency and to facilitate the eventual closure of the WVDP site."

If all 42 buildings are demolished, the DOE is estimating that some 800 truckloads of waste and debris will be taken off site, includ-

ing more than 91,000 cubic feet of Class A low-level waste which will be shipped to either Nevada, Washington or Utah. During 2005, the last full calendar year, DOE estimates that 300,000 cubic feet of low-level waste has been removed from West Valley, or three times the amount which will be taken away under the latest plan.

"The impacts to members of the public from release of non-radioactive hazardous materials are expected to be minimal," the report added. It indicated that the "maximally exposed" individual would still have an exposure hazard more than five times below the currently defined safety limits. About 9,200 people live within a six mile radius

of the site.

About 90 percent of the debris removal would be non-nuclear or hazardous materials, involving industrial waste, concrete and debris, the DOE said.

The public will be invited to make comments on the plan at a public session Wednesday, July 12 starting at 7 p.m. in the Ashford Office Complex. To register to speak at the meeting, contact WVDP at 942-2152.

Written comments may be submitted to WVDP EA Comments, 10282 Rock Springs Road, West Valley, 14171-9799, Comments should be received by July 13. A copy of the report can be accessed on line at www.wv.doe.gov.