



Friends of the Earth

For immediate release
October 9, 2013

DOE reveals delays in plutonium disposition program

Environmental review contract revisions postpone fate of
mismanaged plutonium fuel (MOX) program into 2014

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Key decisions about the Department of Energy's program on the disposal of surplus weapons plutonium face additional significant delays, according to documents released by the department. The delays mean that the fate of the troubled program to fabricate plutonium fuel, known as mixed oxide fuel or MOX, from surplus weapons material faces new uncertainties and will not be determined until well into 2014.

On October 4, DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration posted changes to the contract for the company reviewing environmental impacts of the plutonium disposition program. The changes indicate that important decisions on the future of the costly program have been postponed for a year and a half. The changes to the Environmental Impact Statement contract were placed on Federal Business Opportunities website. Key changes to the contract include the extended deadline and increased fees to the contractor.

The same document that indicates further delays for the MOX Environmental Impact Statement also states that the DOE's "assessment" of plutonium disposition options, which was announced as part of the FY14 budget release in April 2013, will be delayed until mid-2014. This assessment is to review practical alternatives to the MOX program and audit the spiraling cost overruns that the program has faced since its earliest days.

Though no MOX customers have been identified, DOE is currently constructing a MOX fabrication plant at DOE's Savannah River Site in South Carolina on the speculation that a utility will offer its reactors for use of the experimental MOX fuel. Due to mismanagement the estimate for construction of the MOX facility has soared from \$1.8 billion in 2004 to \$4.8 billion in 2008 to \$7.7 billion in 2013. Friends of the Earth estimates another \$22 billion is required for MOX program, making it unsustainable given the current federal budget stresses.

One leading alternative to the MOX program is disposing of the surplus plutonium as waste. This could be done by packaging the plutonium with high level radioactive waste to create a theft-detering radiation barrier and emplacing the waste in a secure geologic repository. Documents obtained by Friends of the Earth in response to a Freedom of Information Act request indicate that disposing of the plutonium in DOE's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico appears to be much cheaper than MOX. Friends of the Earth supports disposal of plutonium as nuclear waste, as fabrication into MOX creates proliferation risks due to increased handling, introduction into commerce and challenges during reactor operation.

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"DOE's admission that decisions about plutonium disposition have been posted until next year indicates big trouble for the mismanaged MOX program," said Katherine Fuchs, nuclear subsidies campaigner with Friends of the Earth. "The stunning delays indicate that the skyrocketing costs, technical problems and schedules delays with MOX are catching up with the mismanaged program and could well spell its doom."

According to the NNSA contract-change notice, issuance of the "Record of Decision" on the final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on plutonium disposition options has been delayed until April 30, 2014. After postponing release of the key document since October 2012, DOE currently lists the release of the SEIS document as being "under departmental review."

Notes:

NNSA plutonium disposition contract-change notice in FedBizOpps, October 4, 2013

<https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=3dd5e4a0f218ff95095f12b214895fa7&tab=core&cvview=0>

Attachment to contract notice: "Final Approved LIMITED SOURCES JUSTIFICATION"

<https://www.fbo.gov/utills/view?id=8f44178d90337968b53b6d11cc8b6aea>

[Note: This document, which includes details about the need for the change to the contract on preparation of the Supplemental EIS, indicates that the "Record of Decision" on the SEIS has been delayed until "approximately April 30, 2013" but Friends of the Earth has confirmed from the NNSA contact that "2013" is a typographical error that should be "2014."]

DOE'S Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance "SCHEDULES OF KEY ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS," September 15, 2013

http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2013/09/f2/KeyEISSchedule_September2013.pdf

NNSA Plutonium Disposition Supplemental EIS (SEIS) website:

<http://www.nnsa.energy.gov/aboutus/ouoperations/generalcounsel/nepaoverview/nepa/spd/supplementaleis>

Freedom of Information Act documents from DOE, indicating plutonium disposal in WIPP is about \$100,000/kg, which is much cheaper than MOX, July 24, 2013:

<http://tinyurl.com/m26kmvy>

Friends of the Earth MOX life-cycle cost report, April 4, 2013 - \$22 billion left to be spent on the overall MOX program: <http://tinyurl.com/nwmkb8c>



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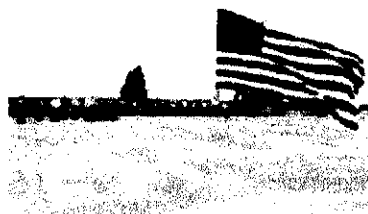
National Journal

NNSA Sets Spring 2014 as Target For Plutonium-Disposition Decision

Oct. 9, 2013

By Douglas P. Guarino

Global Security Newswire



Workers celebrate the completion of the roof of the mixed oxide fuel facility at Savannah River, South Carolina in April. Construction has since been slowed as the administration reviews its options for plutonium disposition (Photo courtesy Shaw Areva MOX Services).

WASHINGTON – The National Nuclear Security Administration has made spring of 2014 the target for completing an assessment of its options for disposing surplus weapons-grade plutonium -- a move observers say suggests the construction slowdown at the agency's controversial reprocessing facility in South Carolina could last another year.

The agency announced the construction slowdown of the mixed-oxide fuel fabrication facility at its Savannah River site in April 2013, as part of the Obama administration's rollout of its fiscal 2014 budget proposal. The facility is meant to dispose of weapons-grade materials by converting them into fuel for power plants, but a series of delays and cost overruns associated with the project prompted the administration to reconsider whether there are more efficient disposal options.

Anne Harrington, deputy NNSA administrator for defense nuclear nonproliferation, told *Global Security Newswire* in August that the agency would not release an anticipated supplemental environmental impact statement regarding plutonium disposition until after it completed the assessment of its options. At the time, however, Harrington did not indicate how long that process would take. The environmental impact statement had previously been scheduled for release earlier this year.

A notice the agency made public Oct. 4 extends the contract for work on the document until September 2014. The notice, dated Sept. 5, 2013, says the new target date for issuing the final environmental impact statement is April 30, 2013. NNSA contracting officer Ariane Kaminsky told *GSN* on Wednesday that this was due to a typographical error,

and that the real target was to be April 30, 2014. Kaminsky said the agency was working to revise the notice, but declined to answer questions regarding whether there would be other changes to the document.

The notice cites the ongoing assessment of plutonium disposition options as a reason for the delay in issuing the environmental impact statement. It says the completed assessment is not due until mid-fiscal 2014, or spring of the calendar year.

Tom Clements, of the watchdog group Friends of the Earth, said the new schedule suggests the administration might not announce a decision on how to move forward with plutonium disposition until after it rolls out its fiscal 2015 budget proposal. Clements, a long-time opponent of the MOX project, noted the administration typically releases its budget in late winter or early spring. When it released the fiscal 2014 proposal in early April of this year, it was considered unusually late.

If in fact the administration releases its fiscal 2015 budget proposal before the plutonium-disposition assessment, the budget proposal would likely include reduced funding levels for the MOX project similar to the fiscal 2014 proposal, Clements said. As a result of the new assessment of options and the construction slowdown, the fiscal 2014 budget called for spending \$200 million less than the prior year.

Spokespeople for the administration and Shaw Areva MOX services, the company doing the construction work, could not be reached for comment by press time.

Tags

- [MOX](#)
- [Nuclear Materials Production, Consolidation, Elimination](#)

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League of Women Voters of South Carolina

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Governor's Nuclear Advisory Council 10-10-13

The League (LWVSC) is concerned, as you and the Governor are, about the DOE decision to underfund SRS cleanup in its budget request to Congress. We wrote the delegation over a month ago. To date we have received no response.

We are about to publish a report proposing, until a permanent repository is available, ALL current and future high-level nuclear wastes be treated, managed safely and monitored closely at the locations where wastes are generated. That means at SRS and also at South Carolina reactor sites.

There are important indicators that there will be no move to establish a permanent repository any time soon:

- Not only our delegation, but Congress as a whole is distracted from solving nuclear waste problems, and the proposed Nuclear Waste Administration Act is fuzzy about defense wastes, such as those currently at SRS;
- The industry is downsizing – fewer reactors are generating less electricity because of aging and other issues, so the so-called “Waste Fund” is “collecting” less money because less electricity is contributing less to the Fund;
- Finally, Congress has been diverting the Waste Fund for 30 years – so that the monies are on a spread sheet somewhere, but otherwise are a fiction.

It is entirely likely that nuclear wastes around the country – here and elsewhere – will be overlooked. We could collectively lose sight of a geologic repository.

Therefore LWVSC proposes safe treatment, long-term storage, and monitoring of nuclear wastes at both SRS and also at South Carolina reactors.

We could be absolutely alone if much of the commercial nuclear waste is “tucked away” at SRS, as some local boosters have suggested. Decades ago nuclear waste management leadership was provided by governors Dick Riley, Lamar Alexander, and Dixie Lee Ray – but such leadership is lacking today. There are 70 congressional districts in 39 states with nuclear waste neighbors – as well as many powerful industries. We must hope they will be our future partners in urging a future Congress to act on our concerns about waste accumulating in our collective communities.

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