



WEST VALLEY WASTE WATCH

No. 3
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PURPOSE of Newsletter : To Regularly Review and Summarize Progress or Lack thereof and to Hold Officials Accountable for the Restoring the Environment and Protecting Future Generations from the Danger of Radiation due to Nuclear Reprocessing and Nuclear Waste Disposal at West Valley, New York.

FINAL CLEANUP DECISION March 2010

Following the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS), the Department of Energy issued its Record of Decision. DOE decided to pursue Phased-Decision Making. The Decommissioning Plan only addresses Phase 1, and just over 1% of buried waste, that is not already treated in some way, ie., the vitrified high level waste logs. The DOE Decision ignored thousands of comments calling for a Complete Cleanup of the West Valley Radioactive Waste Site from elected officials and members of the public including Members of Congress, State Legislators and local officials. The Seneca Nation and several counties also adopted resolutions in support of a complete cleanup. Despite unanimous support for a complete cleanup DOE decided to proceed with Phase 1 only and despite many substantive comments made only a single change in final documents. DOE agreed to make its cleanup decision about Phase 2 in 10 years instead of 30 years. Phase 2 would address all the major remaining facilities-- the High Level Waste tanks, and two disposal sites- federal and state.

DOE & New York State DISAGREE

DOE prefers to cover and enclose the remaining wastes in-place. However, the analysis done by DOE failed to adequately consider how unstable the ground is on the plateau where the West Valley Reprocessing Center was established. The plateau is very susceptible to erosion and numerous water courses on the site mean that frequent and expensive engineering would be required to contain the dangerous radioactivity over the long term. But DOE made the dangerous assumption that once closed in-place, there would be minimal need for ongoing maintenance and allocated limited resources in their analysis for the EIS. An independent Full Cost Accounting Study released in December of 2009 demonstrated that a Complete Cleanup was both SAFER over the long term and CHEAPER than pursuing partial short term remedies like in-place closure. See: http://www.cectoxic.org/Radioactive.html#anchor_70

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The West Valley Demonstration Project Act requires that all wastes be removed from the site and sent for proper disposal. However the nation currently has no permanent high level waste repository. DOE cannot therefore meet the requirements of the Act. New York State is concerned that enclosing wastes in place cannot be a permanent solution at this site and that radiation will spread off-site. NYSERDA is the State agency most directly involved at the West Valley site. The Department of Environmental Conservation also plays a role. NYSERDA has argued that the analyses or studies done for the EIS were faulty and new work must be performed before a Phase 2 decision can be made.

DOE and NYSERDA have agreed to complete a set of Phase 1 studies in preparation for making Phase 2 decisions. Phase 1 Studies were used as the entire basis of support for Phased-Decision-making in the EIS. Unfortunately for the public, there was little information about the Phase 1 studies being proposed in the EIS, so the public could not comment on them.

PHASE 1 BEGINS OR DOES IT? Over One Year Later- No Progress & the Public is Left out.

Phase 1 was off to a rocky start with the public following the Record of Decision in the Spring of 2010 when DOE informed the public that only 1 change had been made in the EIS as a result of our voluminous, substantive and technical comments.

In the fall of 2010 we received the Phase 1 guidance for the Phase 1 process, which failed to really talk about public participation. A key goal is for the agencies to reach consensus-- NOT to meaningfully involve the public in a process to adequately address cleanup at the site and protect public health. Numerous groups have expressed concerns about the lack of independence of the so-called independent scientific panel and the absence of either a technical consultant to address public concerns or a mechanism for the public to interact with the scientific experts. As proposed currently the public will not be allowed to attend the

scientific meetings or to offer comments, as is standard procedure for many federal and state advisory meetings. In March of 2011 several interest groups submitted a letter addressing the needs for improved public information and participation, as well as recommended Phase 1 studies to be undertaken. However none of the recommendations related to public participation have been addressed. The agencies have focused their attention on bringing new consultants on board and writing the contracts. Fall meeting agendas focused primarily on introducing new consultant personnel not informing the public about the work plans.

Activities during Phase 1 are of two distinct types:
Physical activities at the site to complete Phase 1 tasks

Studies to be identified decided upon and completed to aid decision-making about the cleanup of remaining site facilities and contamination. Phase 1 studies will help the agencies and others to make Phase 2 decisions.

The November 2011 Quarterly meeting did not provide substantive information about upcoming work, nor did it address any of the recommendations made to improve public participation.

PUBLIC DEMANDS ACCOUNTABILITY

An Overview of Work for the Next Year with (later for the next 2 and 3 years) A long term project should have a long term projected timeline.

The Overview could be in 2 parts reflecting separately-- physical site work and studies- and including timelines for each.

A better plan for public information and participation, that is fully discussed in a public meeting and agreed upon including webcasts/webinars of meetings with agendas and materials provided in advance (as examples).

More discussion needed of the Characterization, Sampling and Analysis Plan. (DOE does not consider this a Phase I study.) Oversight of this important project is needed, as well as identification of data gaps not being filled by this study. Those not filled must be addressed by other Phase 1 studies.

PUBLIC CONCERNS

Budget issues-- federal support for West Valley work has not been based on needs and extraordinary delays have been the result. Phase 1 could take longer than 10 years if funding is not increased substantially. Delaying cleanup of the strontium plume is a key example of how delays contribute to both a wider area of contamination and increased eventual costs. Current funding levels will mean 4 years just to move the

vitrified logs out of the main process building. Tearing down the building in order to dig up the source area of the plume will add additional time. The zeolite treatment wall has a useful life of just twenty years-- the more contamination treated by the wall, the shorter its useful life.

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The high level waste tanks are now at the end of their useful lives and could be generating their own plume of contamination.

The plan for storage of canisters containing vitrified high level waste logs was supposed to involve the construction of a new building, as described in the EIS. Unfortunately in an appendix footnote DOE indicated that the facility DOE plans is not a building but a concrete pad for dry casks. We are concerned about the adequacy of this protection, the instability of the ground at West Valley for any

long term storage of high level waste and the lack of a final national disposal site.

Demolition of the main process building using explosives raises public health concerns related to the spread of radiation offsite.

ADVANCING MORE NUCLEAR FOR WEST VALLEY

The US Department of Energy has apparently enlisted the support of local elected officials to sell the public on future nuclear uses for the West Valley site. After DOE took a Town of Ashford supervisor on a nuclear tour this year, the Supervisor was very excited to tell the Citizens Task Force about the economic opportunities associated with hosting a national interim storage facility for high level waste at West Valley. This idea was shot down by other Town

elected officials, but, immediately thereafter, this supervisor managed to get a meeting with the DOE person in charge, Cynthia Anderson, of the Asset Revitalization Program in Washington, DC. The presentation at the Jan. 25th CTF meeting also touted the opportunities of this program. Missing, however, was a discussion of the fact that this program includes site revitalization for future nuclear projects. At Savannah River, this included new nuclear projects. Citizens have the right to be fully informed about what the full range of possible projects are and whether they have a choice of possible projects after entering the program.

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