

House Version of Fiscal 2006 Energy Budget Includes Appropriations for Interim SF Storage, Reprocessing Studies

The U.S. House of Representatives' \$29.7-billion energy and water funding bill for fiscal 2006 allocates \$24.6 billion for the U.S. Department of Energy and of that, \$661 million for the DOE waste program. This amount is \$10 million over the budget request. The appropriation also adds \$10 million for the acquisition of transport casks for spent fuel, providing a total of \$20 million to support interim storage of spent nuclear fuel. According to a report accompanying the bill, the House is recommending that the DOE begin to move utility spent fuel to one or more federal interim storage sites in 2006, given that it may be a decade or more until the federal spent fuel repository at Yucca Mountain opens.

Rep. David Hobson (R-Ohio), chairman of the Energy and Water Subcommittee, said the bill would require the DOE to use one or more of its sites to begin storing spent fuel in 2006. The bill did not indicate which site or

The appropriation also adds \$10 million for the acquisition of transport casks for spent fuel, providing a total of \$20 million to support interim storage of spent nuclear fuel.

sites could be used, but Hobson noted that the DOE is already storing spent fuel from foreign research reactors at some of its sites.

The bill also included language requiring the DOE to submit a plan to Congress by January 31, 2007, that would include the selection of an advanced reprocessing technology for further development and a competitive process to select one or more sites to develop integrated spent fuel recycling facilities (i.e., reprocessing, preparation of mixed oxide fuel, vitrification of high-level waste products, and temporary process storage).

The nuclear industry was skeptical that the money ap-

propriated would be enough to launch an interim spent fuel storage program, and key Senators were cool, if not dismissive, to the House proposal. The industry also noted that under current law, any temporary spent fuel storage facility must be licensed by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and that Private Fuel Storage LLC has been trying to license its proposed away-from-reactor storage facility for nearly eight years. (Congress could, of course, change the law to allow a DOE interim storage facility to operate without an NRC license.)

Looks Like Early 2006 for Yucca Mountain License Application

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that it will be ready to certify in late July or August that it has properly posted 3.5 million Yucca Mountain documents to the Internet-based Licensing Support Network. The documents must be posted to the Network at least six months prior to submission of a license application for the Yucca Mountain high-level waste and spent fuel repository, which means that it will be around February 2006 at the earliest before the application can be submitted. However, the DOE noted, some of the factors that could influence the submittal date, such as when a new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency radiation standard would be available, are out of its control.

The DOE attempted to certify the document posting last year, but withdrew the certification after complaints from the state of Nevada and other parties that the database was incomplete and poorly organized.

NRC Commissioners Scuttle Solid Materials Release Proposed Rule

In a June 1 Staff Requirements Memorandum, the commissioners of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission disapproved publication of the proposed rule for radiological criteria for controlling the disposition of slightly radioactive (1 mrem/year) solid materials. Although all commissioners were highly complimentary of the extensive effort the NRC staff put into developing the proposed rule, all felt that there are several high-priority and complex tasks that take precedence over this rule. In addition, all commissioners noted that the National Academy of

Sciences study found that the NRC's current case-by-case program is working satisfactorily. The Commission noted that, at such time future budget allocations permit, the rulemaking could be taken up again.

Vermont Bill Requires Entergy to Pay for Vermont Yankee Dry Cask Storage, Plant Upate

A bill passed by the Vermont House and Senate and, at press time, awaiting the governor's signature would require plant owner Entergy Nuclear (or any future plant owner) to seek a "certificate of public good" from the Vermont public service board prior to constructing an Independent Spent Fuel Storage Installation (ISFSI) for the Vermont Yankee plant. The bill would also require that Entergy pay for establishing an ISFSI, as well as uprating the plant by 20 percent, with such monies as the state accrues going to the Vermont Clean Energy Development Fund. This fund would be used for the development and deployment of "cost-effective and environmentally sustainable electric power resources." The amount of money Entergy would pay, delineated in a separate memorandum of understanding between Entergy and the state, would total a little more than \$15.6 million, to be paid between January 1, 2006 and March 12, 2012.

The ISFSI itself would be limited to storing a cumulative amount of spent fuel derived from the operation of the plant up to, but not beyond, March 21, 2012, the end of the term for the current operating license. Storage of additional fuel if the plant obtains a license extension would require General Assembly approval.

ASLB Again Rules in Favor of PFS and Against Challenge by Utah

Private Fuel Storage LLC, a utility consortium created to operate an away-from-reactor spent fuel storage facility in Utah, has won another victory in its slow licensing process. In a 2-1 decision, an Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) ruled in favor of PFS, and against the state of Utah, on the issue of an F-16 military jet accidentally crashing into a cask at the facility and causing a ra-

diological release of materials. The ASLB reaffirmed the conclusion it reached in February that the likelihood of such an event was less than one in a million. Utah, which

The ASLB reaffirmed the conclusion it reached in February that the likelihood of such an event was less than one in a million.

opposes the siting of the facility in the state, will appeal the licensing board's determination to the full U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and possibly to the U.S. Courts of Appeal for the 10th Circuit or District of Columbia Circuit.

The final decision on the PFS license will be made by the NRC commissioners.

D&D Updates

- On May 23, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission granted Portland General Electric's request to terminate the Trojan nuclear power plant license. The NRC concluded, based on onsite inspections and independent measurements, that dismantlement and decontamination activities were performed in accordance with the approved license termination plan and that the final surveys and associated documentation demonstrate that the facility and site have met the criteria for decommissioning outlined in 10 CFR Part 20. The plan had closed in November 1992.
 - The largest waste shipping campaign in the U.S. Department of Energy complex has been completed. Beginning in April 1999, when the first 60-car unit train left the former Fernald uranium processing facility in Ohio for the 1900-mile trip to the Envirocare of Utah site, Fernald cleanup workers have excavated nearly one million tons of waste generated during the uranium production era. The 154th (and final) train left the site on June 15.
- Fluor Fernald, the cleanup contractor, expects to complete the cleanup, soil certification, and site restoration by

spring 2006, ahead of schedule.

- The last of the liquid sodium in the primary cooling system of the U.S. Department of Energy's Fast Flux Test Facility was expected to be completely drained—on schedule—by the end of June. The draining operation deadline is part of the Tri-Party Agreement between the DOE, the state of Washington, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which sets out cleanup terms for the Hanford site. The liquid sodium will be transferred to the Sodium Storage Facility nearby. The final deactivation of the facility will prevent it from future operations.
- Some 16 000 drums of transuranic (TRU) waste have been shipped from the Savannah River Site to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant since 2001. The more than 500 shipments mean that SRS has achieved its target case objective 18 months ahead of the original schedule, and has reduced the onsite legacy TRU waste volumes by a third. The original schedule called for completion of the SRS TRU waste shipment program by 2034; based on an aggressive new schedule, however, all TRU waste should be permanently stored at WIPP by 2010, 24 years ahead of schedule. The shipment work is the responsibility of BNG America Savannah River Corp., a wholly owned subsidiary of BNG America. SRS is operated by Westinghouse Savannah River Corp.

International Briefs

- Decommissioning of the four-unit Calder Hall magnox plant (the United Kingdom's oldest nuclear station) at the Sellafield site will begin as soon as the U.K. Nuclear Installations Inspectorate gives permission (expected in early summer), according to British Nuclear Group, which has a four-year contract to manage Sellafield on behalf of the U.K.'s new Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.
- Spent fuel from Canadian reactors would be placed in an underground repository, possibly in the Canadian Shield, under a proposal released by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization, an advisory group to the federal government. NWMO recommended a phased approach to spent fuel disposal, including onsite storage prior to placement in a repository. It should be up to future generations to decide whether and when to close the repository, the organization recommended. The siting decision itself would be the result of additional public discussion.
- Low-level radioactive waste currently being stored at

the Dounreay facility in Scotland will not be trucked to the United Kingdom's LLW disposal facility at Drigg in England after the Scottish administration refused to allow the waste to leave the site. Instead, the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority will build an addition to an existing LLW storage facility at Dounreay. The Scottish environment minister is insisting that the waste "be dealt with at Dounreay, where it is produced." The additional storage will probably take around a year to build at a cost of around £1.5 million (around \$2.7 million U.S.). Without the addition, the UKAEA will run out of LLW storage capacity at the Dounreay site in 2006, while LLW continues to be generated due to site cleanup activities.

- ENRESA, Spain's nuclear waste agency, wants to build a centralized temporary spent fuel and waste storage facility at the site of an existing nuclear station. According to ENRESA, the central facility would be less expensive and safer than keeping the spent fuel and waste at each of the seven nuclear plant sites.
- A senior adviser to the United Kingdom's Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM) has resigned from the panel, protesting the group's "open antagonism" to the views of nuclear specialists. David Ball, professor of risk management at Middlesex University, said the panel had become obsessed with public consultation at the expense of expert advice. He is the second scientist to leave the panel in recent months; Keith Baverstock, a former head of radiation protection at the World Health Organization and the panel's only health expert, was dismissed by the U.K. environment minister after attacking the panel as dysfunctional and amateurish. Similar criticisms have been made by the House of Lords Science Committee and the Royal Society, which have questioned whether CoRWM is making proper use of scientific advice.

The panel was established in 2003 to review the U.K.'s options for disposing of nuclear waste. It will report to ministers in July 2006 with a recommended solution that is both workable and most acceptable to the public. Many independent experts have expressed dismay that the panel has taken a long time to rule out many options that have already been examined and rejected by scientists all over the world. But according to Prof. Ball, an even greater problem with the panel has been its attitude to science, which has been viewed as secondary in importance to public opinion. ■