

Your Tax Dollars at Work

If you read the business pages or watch business news on television, you have probably encountered news of people asking: "Where is all that stimulus money going?" or "When will we see some results from the stimulus act?" They are referring, of course, to the nearly \$800-billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds, which are supposed to provide jobs for unemployed Americans to stimulate a healthier economy.

I can't speak for urban renewal projects in New Jersey or road repairs in Indiana, but I *can* tell you where some of the stimulus money is going: to speed up the remediation work at several of the nation's nuclear waste cleanup sites. Some \$6 billion has been allocated to the U.S. Department of Energy's Environmental Management (EM) Office, the entity that oversees the DOE's nuclear cleanup projects, and those funds must be spent by the end of fiscal year 2011. This means that a lot of projects are seeing a big injection of funding, leading to faster cleanups and earlier project terminations—at least in theory.

The pages of this magazine have already listed examples of work that the stimulus money is funding. In the September/October 2009 issue, there was the article, "Putting the Stimulus to Work" (page 18), which listed many of the projects that an extra \$1.6 billion at the Savannah River Site will be addressing. For the most part, these are "shovels in the ground" projects—work requiring lots of people doing lots of dirty work. If you are in the dirt moving or building demolition business, especially *radioac-*

tively contaminated dirt and buildings, this is your time.

In this issue, the "Headlines" section lists several projects at the Hanford Site that will see plenty of forward movement because of stimulus funding. Hanford is getting the largest single chunk of ARRA monies that are going to the DOE: some \$1.96 billion. To put that in perspective, remember that the EM Office generally has an annual budget in the \$5 billion–\$6 billion range. Fully half of that money goes to *maintaining* the properties that EM controls. For example, as we have learned the hard way with the K-25 buildings at the Oak Ridge site, if you don't maintain the roofs of buildings that you know will eventually be demolished, you make that eventual demolition a lot more dangerous for workers and for the environment. Because safety is the number-one priority on EM projects, site maintenance is essential.

Still, if half of your \$6 billion goes to maintenance, that leaves just \$3 billion for all the cleanup and decommissioning work. Divide that \$3 billion among 20-odd sites, and while a billion dollars is still a lot of money, it doesn't go as far as perhaps we think it should. So a booster shot of an extra \$6 billion, none of which has to go for maintenance, means that a lot of projects should get bumped up the completion ladder, and site footprints should get smaller.

Sites have another two years to spend their stimulus funds. Savannah River has already hired an additional 1000 workers, and maintains that a total of some 3000 jobs will either be added or saved because of the work



Shovels in the Ground; Money in Your Pocket

being done under stimulus funding. Other sites have similar stories to tell.

It should be enlightening to see the progress made over the next two years. We often talk about how wonderful it would be to get extra funding for some of these projects. Now that such funding is in hand, we need to show that we know how to spend it wisely, to the best advantage for both the sites and the taxpayers who are providing that much-needed economic stimulus.—*Nancy J. Zacha, Editor*