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Bush Budget: Making Do with Less

The funding numbers were no surprise when the U.S. Department of Energy released its proposed 2002 budget on April 9, since preliminary figures had been floating around Capitol Hill for weeks. For Fiscal Year 2002, the Bush administration is proposing to reduce the DOE budget from \$19.7 billion to \$19.2 billion. The funding for environmental cleanup would drop from

the 2001 figure of \$6.267 billion to \$5.913 billion. This means the DOE's cleanup programs would have to absorb \$354 million of the total \$500 million budget cut.

Of course, this is just the Bush proposal. Congress has to approve the budget, and both houses of Congress have gone on record as supporting cleanup funding of about \$6.6 billion. A hagggle between Congress and the Bush administration thus looms ahead.

In releasing the budget numbers, Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham said that the department's cleanup priorities remain the Rocky Flats and Fernald sites, which have cleanup deadlines of 2006. For other cleanup sites, the priorities are basic health, safety, and environmental concerns, Abraham said.

But sites such as Hanford, Oak Ridge, Idaho Falls, and Savannah River, which have agreements with the DOE, the states, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency over cleanup funding levels and cleanup rates, may be facing lawsuits from state agencies if the current numbers are not revised upward to previously agreed-upon levels.

A total of \$445 million (an increase of 14 percent) was requested for the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management. Work during the fiscal year, the DOE said, will focus on continuing a transition from predominantly investigative science at Yucca Mountain to engineering and design to support the preparation of a license application to be submitted to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, if the site is determined to be scientifically suitable.

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Despite Protesters, German Waste Shipments Reach Gorleben Site

It was a rough trip for some nuclear waste being shipped from France back to Germany. The shipment, 60 tons of waste left over from spent nuclear fuel from Germany reprocessed in France, was headed to the

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Gorleben storage site via rail and truck.

The train, with six flatcars loaded with Castor canisters, left the French village of Valognes, near the La Hague reprocessing plant, just before dawn on Monday, March 26. It crossed into Germany late that evening. Once in Germany, the train had to go some 375 miles (625 kilometers) to Gorleben. Hoping to avoid violence, Germany put 15 000 police on alert along the route, and more than 2000 officers were awaiting the train at the French/Ger-

man border. And German police promised tough action against any blockades by protesters.

Antinuclear protesters attempted blockades all along the line between France and Dannenberg, the end of the rail line. Protesters chained and cemented themselves to the train tracks and placed obstacles on the tracks as well. They ultimately succeeded in delaying the train trip by about a day.

In Dannenberg, where the Castor casks were removed from the train and placed on trucks for the last 15 miles (25 km) of the trip, demonstrators placed sandbags across the road. But police lined the stretch of road, and the trucks arrived at their final destination on the morning of Thursday, March 29.

The shipment and accompanying demonstrations were an embarrassment for the German Green Party, which is the junior partner in the coalition government. Green Party leaders argued that the country was contractually obliged to take back its waste, a legal point that demonstrators and protesters were unwilling to acknowledge.

- A couple of weeks later, in early April, trains carrying spent nuclear fuel from German power plants (Grafenrheinfeld, Philipps-burg, and Biblis) to the French reprocessing plant at La Hague met with a much reduced level of resistance throughout their route through Germany. Protesters managed to delay the shipment about an hour, but stiff police protection of the shipments prevented any greater disruption.

Federal Appeals Court Dismisses Ward Valley Damages Suit

On March 30, 2001, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit ruled that sufficient evidence was not presented to establish that the federal government intended for any third party to have rights under an alleged contract between the federal government and the state of California to purchase the Ward Valley site. Thus, the

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court dismissed a lawsuit filed by American Ecology Corp. subsidiary US Ecology Inc. to recover damages from the federal government for its failure to complete the land transfer for California's Ward Valley low-level radioactive waste disposal project. This ruling does not affect US Ecology's parallel suit against the state of California.

"While we are disappointed in the ruling," noted Jack K. Lemley, chairman, president, and CEO of American Ecology, "American Ecology believes its case against the state of California remains strong. US Ecology intends to vigorously pursue completion of the land acquisition by California or recovery of monetary damages in state court."

This pending suit, besides asking that California complete the land acquisition, seeks recovery of costs incurred by US Ecology, plus interest, lost profits, and certain legal expenses. "The state of California has a contractual obligation to US Ecology and nothing in the recent federal court ruling changes that," Lemley concluded.

Report: U.S. Onsite Dry Spent-Fuel Storage Accelerating

U.S. commercial spent-fuel dry storage inventories increased markedly for a second consecutive year in 2000, according to a new annual assessment by NAC Worldwide

Consulting. NAC Worldwide's *U.S. Spent Fuel Update: Year 2000 in Review* reports that approximately 540 metric tons of U.S. commercial spent fuel was added to dry storage installations in the past year—an almost 50 percent increase over the previous year—bringing total inventories to approximately 2430 MT. Utilities in the United States deployed a record 49 canister or cask systems at sites during the year, bringing the total number of spent-fuel systems deployed at U.S. plant sites to 233. NAC projects that an additional 107 dry spent-fuel systems will be loaded during 2001.

Three new dry storage facilities—at Dresden, Hatch, and Peach Bottom—commenced operations in 2000, and one other, Rancho Seco, received a site-specific license. Fuel loading at Rancho Seco was expected to begin this spring. At the current time, 17 independent spent-fuel storage installations are licensed in the United States, with 15 of those currently storing spent fuel.

The quantity of spent fuel currently in dry storage systems represents about 6 percent of the total U.S. spent-fuel inventory. NAC Worldwide projects a continued increase in dry storage, reaching almost one-third of the current U.S. inventory by 2010. This increase is attributed to fuel pools reaching capacity, decommissioning requirements, and the availability of licensed new-generation dry storage systems. The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission licensed four new spent-fuel management technology systems in 2000. ■

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