

Energy Budget

Nevada Sen. Harry Reid (D), new chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, managed to slash funding for the Yucca Mountain project in the process of approving a large budget increase for the U.S. Department of Energy. The Senate appropriations bill provides \$20.2 billion for the DOE, \$1.9 billion more than fiscal 2001 funding and \$2.1 billion above the president's budget request. In particular, appropriations for the DOE's nuclear weapons cleanup program were increased significantly. But appropriations for the Yucca Mountain project were cut by 40 percent, from \$435 million to \$275 million.

Two days later, however, the Senate voted to insert language in the appropriations bill directing Senate conferees on the spending bill to seek funding for Yucca Mountain that is closer to that included in the House-passed version of the bill. The House has appropriated \$443 million for the Yucca Mountain project.

Envirocare Delay Expansion for Classes B, C Waste Disposal

Envirocare of Utah Inc., which last year applied for a license from the state of Utah to allow disposal of Classes B and C low-level waste at its LLW disposal site (currently restricted to Class A waste), announced in July that it has received approval for its license from the state (pending a final okay from the state legislature, which is not meeting again until early next year).

However, the company said, at this time it has decided not to use the license, but rather is putting its expansion plans on hold. The reason for this action, the company said, is because of public confusion over the Envirocare site and the proposed Private Fuel Storage LLC (PFS) facility being planned on Native American land in the state.

Envirocare has generally enjoyed good relations with the state of Utah and clearly wants to keep things that way. The state's governor strongly opposes the PFS facility, and the state has passed several laws designed to prevent the facility from being built. Envirocare appears willing to wait

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until the dispute between the state and PFS is settled, one way or the other, before continuing with its plans to expand its LLW disposal capabilities.

Envirocare did point out that its Class A containerized cell would open before the end of summer and said that this new facility would go a long way toward increasing the country's waste disposal options.

Putin Approves Russia's Spent-Fuel Import Plans

Russian President Vladimir Putin has approved changes to Russia's environmental laws to allow the import of foreign spent nuclear fuel for reprocessing and interim storage. Russia envisions signing contracts to import up to 20 000 metric tons of spent fuel from such countries as Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and several European nations over the next 10 years. These contracts would be worth up to \$20 billion, income that the country could certainly find useful.

Along with his approval, Putin named a special commission to review all proposed waste imports. This commission will be chaired by Zhores Alferov, a nuclear physicist and strong proponent of the import plan. Alferov also serves as the vice president of Russia's Academy of Science.

The United States has not officially approved or disapproved Russia's plans. According to several sources, however, the U.S. government may officially back the pro-

posal, especially with regard to Taiwan, since it would resolve a serious waste storage problem for that country.

DOE Decides on Solvent Extraction for SRS Cleanup

The U.S. Department of Energy has decided to use a solvent extraction technology to process the more than 31 million gallons of highly radioactive salt waste at the Savannah River Site. The DOE had earlier appeared to be leaning toward using other technologies, but said that recent improvements in solvent extraction have made that technology the most preferable, with the least technical risk. The waste is stored in 49 aging underground tanks at the SRS, many of which have developed small leaks.

The SRS salt waste program has experienced delays because the DOE's previous approach, in-tank precipitation, resulted in unexpected generation of benzene gas during operation, leading to the shutdown of the \$500-million facilities built to do the work. A new facility to perform the solvent extraction operations will cost about \$1 billion.

The facility will separate the wastes into high- and low-level wastes. The HLW will be sent to the SRS vitrification facility, while the LLW portion will be solidified in cement and buried at the site. If the salt waste cannot be processed, all 31 million gallons would have to be vitrified, adding years and hundreds of millions of dollars to the cleanup operation. ■