



Many Voices Working for the Community

Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

October 22, 2008

Contact: Spencer Gross, 241-4584

Advisory Board Cautions DOE about Allowing Buildings to Deteriorate Prior to Demolition

Even though a building may be targeted for demolition, it shouldn't be allowed to deteriorate to the point that it's a hazard when the time comes for its destruction.

That's one part of a recommendation a federally appointed advisory board has made to the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Environmental Management Program. The Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board is a 20-member volunteer panel, composed of area residents, charged with monitoring the environmental management program and providing recommendations or advice on activities related to environmental cleanup of various areas on the department's Oak Ridge Reservation.

DOE is well into the cleanup of the reservation, which includes remediation of contaminated land, waterways, and the decontamination and demolition of buildings that are no longer used or needed. The DOE Oak Ridge Office has a proposal before headquarters to take on additional work to eliminate more than 200 such buildings and facilities at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the Y-12 National Security Complex. The plan, known as the Integrated Facility Disposition Project, is working its way through the approval process in Washington, DC.

While the advisory board endorses the project, it wants to make sure that the situation DOE EM is currently dealing with at the mammoth K-25 Building at East Tennessee Technology Park isn't repeated.

The K-25 Building enriched uranium for defense and commercial purposes for 20 years. But when operations ceased in 1964 the building's structural integrity slowly declined to the point that dismantling it became a very dangerous, time-consuming, and costly proposition.

The Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board approved a formal recommendation at its October 8 meeting that DOE should make sure facilities targeted in the proposed disposition project are not allowed to deteriorate to the point that would increase the hazards and final cost of disposition.

The board also recommended that the DOE budgets should be adequate to conduct surveillance and maintenance of the facilities to prevent deterioration to unsafe conditions that could result in hazardous demolition or an environmental release. "While it's been said that millions would have been spent on surveillance and maintenance of K-25 over the years, we've also probably spent millions and millions because we didn't," said board member Kevin Westervelt. "I wonder

if a cost benefit analysis could be done to determine if a little bit of money for preventive maintenance could have saved a higher bill for the final demolition of K-25.”

Steve McCracken, DOE-Oak Ridge assistant manager for Environmental Management agreed. “It’s absolutely a lesson learned,” he said the October board meeting. “And it doesn’t take much analysis to figure that out. This is something we could look at.”

The board said DOE, in prioritizing the work, should consider the effects of deterioration expected to occur before disposition activities begin. The board’s recommendation said “the savings that can be realized by preventing deterioration, or adjusting the priority for disposition, should be included as a key factor in prioritization.”

The recommendation also stated that DOE shouldn’t overlook the historical significance of work done at Oak Ridge National Lab and Y-12. The board said DOE should define and address historic preservation issues related to the project. “Because the scope [of the project] will essentially eliminate all of the legacy contamination and the associated older facilities in the DOE inventory, this will be the final chance for preserving key historical content associated with those past operations.” The board suggested that historic preservation planning with interested community members and stakeholders should occur early in the next planning stage if the project receives DOE approval to continue.

The board asked for a response to its recommendations within 90 days as well as periodic updates on the progress of the Integrated Facility Disposition Project.

The complete text of the board’s recommendation is available at <http://www.oakridge.doe.gov/em/ssab/Recommendations/FY2009/Recommendation175.pdf>.

The Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. at the DOE Information Center, 475 Oak Ridge Turnpike, Oak Ridge. The meetings are open to the public.