



Many Voices Working for the Community

Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Advisory Board Sends Recommendations to DOE on FY 2011 Budget

The advisory board that monitors the Department of Energy's (DOE) cleanup operations on the Oak Ridge Reservation has recommended that DOE Headquarters provide enough money in the FY 2011 budget so DOE Oak Ridge doesn't have to 'rob Peter to pay Paul.' The Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board (ORSSAB) is a federally chartered citizens' panel that provides advice and recommendations to DOE's environmental cleanup of the Oak Ridge Reservation. The board approved the recommendation at its April meeting.

Agencies of the federal government begin planning budget proposals two years in advance, so work is already underway by the various DOE field offices to prepare requests for FY 2011. Advisory boards like ORSSAB have the opportunity to weigh in on what they believe are important projects to be funded. ORSSAB made three recommendations to DOE Oak Ridge on items it believes need additional funding.

The first recommendation concerns funding for disposal of uranium-233 at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL).

When Congress directed DOE to dispose of stored uranium-233 in the 3019 Building Complex at the lab, the job fell to the DOE Environmental Management (EM) Program. DOE EM Headquarters told Oak Ridge to get rid of the stuff but didn't provide funds to do it.

This is not an easy job and has cost DOE Oak Ridge about \$50 million a year to address the problem. That has caused DOE to take money away from other cleanup projects already in the pipeline, which in turn has resulted in missed milestones agreed to among DOE, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC). While some missed milestones can be renegotiated if circumstances warrant it, TDEC doesn't recognize lack of funding as a reason for missing milestones. Some of the missed milestones have led to a couple of disputes among the three agencies.

In its recommendation to DOE EM Headquarters, ORSSAB said it is unacceptable for DOE-Oak Ridge cleanup efforts at the Y-12 National Security Complex and ORNL to be impacted significantly year after year because the work at the 3019 Complex is mandated as a higher priority but no additional funding has been added to the EM budget to do the work. The board argues that the work at the 3019 Complex does nothing to address more pressing environmental issues at Y-12 and ORNL.

The ORSSAB recommendation also includes a request for additional funding to finish excavating some buried transuranic waste in a spot in Melton Valley called Trench 13. Work was being done several years ago to remove the waste in the trench when a brief flare-up occurred as some pyrophoric material was unearthed and reacted with the air. Work was immediately shut down and the trench was recovered with sand and coke.

Restarting the excavation and removing the remaining waste products will complete all of the excavation work called for in a 2000 interim record of decision to remediate Melton Valley of legacy waste from years of disposal operations.

ORSSAB's recommendation has a third component asking for funding to investigate possible migration of contamination from hydrofracture wells in Melton Valley.

The technique of waste disposal by hydrofracture was pilot tested at ORNL to meet the need for permanent disposal of low-level radioactive waste. From 1959 to 1984, 43 injections were made in four very deep wells at the Old Hydrofracture and New Hydrofracture facilities, located near ORNL in Melton Valley. More than 5 million gallons of waste grout were injected into the wells.

As part of the monitoring efforts in Melton Valley, ORSSAB would like for an additional deep well to be placed closer to the hydrofracture wells to determine if any additional contaminated groundwater continues to leave the area following the grouting of the wells during the remediation efforts for Melton Valley.

The full text of the recommendation is available on the ORSSAB website at www.oakridge.doe.gov/em/ssab/recc.htm.

ORSSAB meets the second Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at the DOE Information Center, 475 Oak Ridge Turnpike, Oak Ridge. More information on the board is available at www.oakridge.doe.gov/em/ssab or by calling (865) 241-4583 or 241-4584.