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Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board

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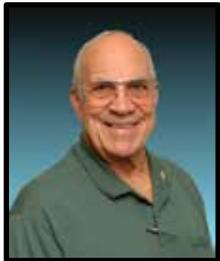
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Stimulus Spending at Oak Ridge: A Boon or A Bust? Effective utilization of the 2009 American Recovery & Reinvestment Act By Dave Hemelright, Vice Chair, Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board

Depending upon which pundit captures your attention at the time, the 2009 stimulus package, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), is one of the most contentious programs ever devised. Opinions on the act run the gamut from a complete waste of American taxpayers' dollars to one of the best programs from Washington since the New Deal of the 1930s and the Great Society of the 1960s.



Regardless of any political or personal beliefs, ARRA funding enabled the Department of Energy's Environmental Management program (DOE EM) to achieve major milestones well ahead of schedule in the environmental clean-up at nuclear sites across the United States. Considering return on investments of dollars spent, DOE EM, along with advice from the local Site Specific Advisory Boards, utilized the funds in the most economical and efficient manner of any of the programs gleaned from the ARRA. The ARRA funding allowed DOE-EM to speed up decontamination and

demolition at numerous sites and award more contracts to private industry to hasten the clean-up of legacy nuclear waste. The DOE Oak Ridge Reservation (ORR) benefited the most from the additional funding.

From 1943 through the 1970s, when the environmental concerns of nuclear waste disposal became a major issue, disposal methods of contaminated waste was done under the best practices at the time. Although those methods would not pass scrutiny today, they were believed to be the best avenues for disposal.

But today legacy waste that was thought to be properly disposed and stored now must be made secure and safe from doing harm to the environment and the population. That means measures must be taken at all disposal sites in the form of constant monitoring to prevent unwanted intrusion, both deliberate and inadvertent. In the case of old buildings and facilities, there are costs of decontamination, demolition, and disposal of debris, and remediation costs.

Extreme care must be taken in handling and disposing of hazardous waste. The workforce must be well trained, well protected, and well compensated. In some cases, lack of maintenance on abandoned nuclear facilities makes decontamination and demolition even more expensive because the buildings must be made safe to be destroyed.

DOE Oak Ridge EM has been allocated in the neighborhood of \$460 million annually to do as much clean-up as possible on the ORR. With ARRA, Oak Ridge received a one-time outlay of \$755 million dollars to accelerate clean-up between 2009 and 2011.

At Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), DOE EM commenced much needed projects to clean up and dispose of unused, contaminated buildings and materials originally used to support the Graphite Reactor and other nuclear experiments at the lab.

The Y-12 National Security Complex received attention in the form of determining which contaminated, unused buildings needed to be addressed so that the spread of hazardous material (primarily mercury) could be isolated. Legacy materials in those buildings have also been removed and disposed. In addition, Y-12 wastewater sewer systems were investigated and mercury contamination in the sewers mitigated. The spread of residual mercury waste was halted as best as possible by containment and treatment of contaminated water.

At the East Tennessee Technology Park (ETTP), work to demolish the old gaseous diffusion plant and other supporting structures was accelerated and the resulting waste materials properly disposed.

With the removal of the contaminated buildings at ORNL, the lab is a safer environment in which to perform its mission, and the risk of accidental discharge or escape of contaminants is greatly reduced. At ETTP, old buildings were demolished and the land made available for industrial development.

Because of the efficient use of ARRA funds, DOE EM was able to accelerate the timetable on the projects at ORNL, Y-12, and ETTP, which allows funds set aside for security and maintenance to be allocated elsewhere. Because of efficiencies by the contractors, about \$100 million of the \$755 million was used on other projects that were not originally considered.

Has the stimulus funding been effective in Oak Ridge? It most certainly has, and it has enabled DOE EM to expand clean-up programs and establish stewardship programs to monitor the land well into the future. At Oak Ridge, the ARRA is a great success, and the effects of ARRA will benefit future generations. Stimulus spending at Oak Ridge has been a definite boon.