

# **Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant Site Specific Advisory Board Meeting Minutes**

*April 16, 1998*

The April 16, 1998, Site Specific Advisory Board (SSAB) meeting took place at the Executive Inn in Paducah at 5:00 p.m.

The following board members were present: Nola Courtney, Mark Donham, Edward Duff, David Fuller, Vicki Jones, Ronald Lamb, and Craig Rhodes. Representing ex officio member Tuss Taylor was Todd Adams. Facilitator present: Steve Kay. The United States Department of Energy (DOE) federal coordinator present was Carlos Alvarado. The Oak Ridge DOE federal coordinator present was Marianne Heiskell. Also present were the following members of the public and contractors and subcontractors to the DOE: Patricia Barnhill, Jeannie Brandstetter, Lou Coots, Ken Davis, JoTilley Dortch, Angela Eaton, Teresa Fields, Kristi Hanson, Shelley Hawkins, Dennis Hill, Chuck Jenkins, Norm Jetta, Debora Jolly, Stan Knaus, Rick Long, John Patton, Robert Quigley, Greg Shaia, Elisabeth Stull, Corinne Whitehead, and Ernest Whitehead.

The SSAB received information handouts as well as the minutes of the last meeting.

Mark Donham asked about the DOE's Community Reuse Organization. Donham inquired about the organization's funding and purpose. Carlos Alvarado suggested that Jimmie Hodges of the DOE or Kristen Reese of the Greater Paducah Economic Development Board be contacted for more information on the organization. Donham asked why the organization was given \$400,000 if it is not an advisory board to the DOE. Alvarado explained facts from a press release which stated that the organization was developed for community transition and to develop jobs in the community in the event of a plant shutdown or severe reduction in workforce. Donham also asked if the organization would discuss future uses of the plant and Alvarado said that was likely.

The proposed meeting agenda was adopted by consensus.

Ken Davis, a hydrogeologist with the Jacobs EM Team, was available to answer questions and give an update on the Five-Year Review for the Northwest Plume as part of the EMEF project updates. Davis explained that the Five-Year Review is a basic assessment of the effectiveness of a given remedial action and a statement of how that action is meeting its remedial goal. He said that part of the assessment is public participation and asked for the SSAB's input on the review. Since the review is scheduled to be completed next month, Davis offered to come back at the next meeting and give a presentation. Mark Donham asked about the regulatory requirement for public input. Davis said involvement must be sought from the public, the government, and operators of the remedial action system. The SSAB agreed to place the presentation from Davis on next month's agenda.

The next item on the agenda was DOE's response to the SSAB recommendations. Alvarado stated that all recommendations had been responded to except one that was in the process of being answered.

Proposals from the SSAB on the Vortec Environmental Assessment (EA) was the next item on the

agenda. Several members of the public were present and made comments on the EA. JoTilley Dortch, a concerned citizen from Paducah, commented that the EA is lacking in some areas and she has questions as to whether the DOE is throwing money away on Vortec when it accomplishes something that the Lasagna process should do. Dortch has concerns on whether Vortec would affect the geology of the site and concerns on seismic conditions at the plant. She said the attitude of the EA was very dangerous and seemed flippant. Dortch said the EA does not properly address what would be done with the glass frit after the Vortec process and whose responsibility this waste would be.

Kristi Hanson, a concerned citizen from Brookport, Illinois, expressed her concerns about Vortec as being hazardous to her health and safety as well as to the people who live close to the plant. Since Vortec is experimental, she said cases of worker error and mechanical breakdown should be considered. Hanson also was concerned about the release of millions of gallons of water containing radionuclides and heavy metals into Big Bayou Creek. Hanson suggested that the DOE prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the cumulative sources of pollution at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant. She said the DOE should concentrate on building storage facilities for the waste until a safe, proven treatment can be found.

Corinne Whitehead, a concerned citizen from Benton, also expressed her concerns about Vortec. Whitehead was concerned about human exposure to radioactive waste from the incineration process. Whitehead urged the DOE to hold up on disposal of this waste until it knows exactly where the contaminants in the air and water are going. Another concern Whitehead had was this area's vulnerability to an earthquake. Whitehead said the DOE should use extreme caution when considering Vortec as an alternative.

Ernest Whitehead, a concerned citizen from Benton, said it was unclear to him whether Vortec could be considered vitrification or incineration. Whitehead said that trichloroethelene is an extremely volatile contaminant and does not see how it can withstand the incineration process.

Lou Coots, a concerned citizen, also made comments concerning her opposition to Vortec. She said Vortec had not been proven to be a successful technology and said that residents of the Paducah area will, in essence, become "guinea pigs" during this project. Coots proposed that an EIS be conducted that will address the cumulative impacts of Vortec. Coots said she felt the public remained uninformed as to the seriousness of the contamination of the area. She said the project is being "pushed down people's throats" without proper studies and technical review.

John Patton from the Vortec Corporation was available to answer questions. Patton explained that since this area is geologically sensitive to earthquakes, the uniform building code that is being designed is Code 3, which is the uniform building code for the state of Kentucky. Patton also said that it takes approximately \$8,000,000 a year just to store waste, so Vortec is a process that will eliminate the waste plus the storage costs. Patton said that rather than expose workers to the waste, the Vortec process would allow an entire waste barrel to be put in the processor. He also said that test data that came out of the pilot project in Pittsburgh is used only for the purpose of being able to design downstream components. Patton offered to stay and answer questions and possibly come back to give a one-on-one workshop to anyone interested.

The Vortec presentation time allocation was extended an additional 30 minutes due to extensive issues

presented by the board and public commentators. Craig Rhodes presented questions about the Vortec process such as the proportion of limestone to soda ash. Rhodes asked what the life-span of the process would be and Patton said approximately one year. Patton said that Vortec is intended to be a demonstrative process in order to evaluate whether it meets air, law, and DOE order requirements. Rhodes raised concerns about the noise level of the demonstration.

Donham also expressed his concerns over the Vortec demonstration, stating that it has similarities to the Toxic Substances Control Act incinerator in Oak Ridge. He said that the community deserves a very detailed study of alternatives for disposal of the waste and a longer comment period on the document. Donham referred to operable units in the Site Management Plan such as Waste Area Group (WAG) 6, WAG 22, and Lasagna™ which have potential environmental impacts and cumulative effects; however, the public is not getting a clear picture of this. Donham said that Vortec is a potentially significant project due to all of the impacts on federal, state, and local requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Donham made a recommendation that a Finding of No Significant Impact not be issued on the Vortec Environmental Assessment. He also proposed that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be issued that takes into account the cumulative impacts. Patton said that he did not think there were any significant impacts from this project. Donham said that the EA could not just state that there were going to be no significant impacts; it must be backed up with data.

The time allocation for Vortec was up once again; however, the SSAB agreed to extend the allocation by 15 minutes. Donham referred to the document Waste Analysis for Glass Feeds Hydrolyzed Uranium Hexafluoride and Uranium Precipitate and said that the substances scheduled to be vitrified have numerous radionuclides in them. Ronald Lamb said that he is concerned that continuous storage of the waste will result in continued exposure to workers and that discharges from Vortec will present even more exposure to the workers. Nola Courtney asked if the DOE could give the board some kind of information about what it would take to prepare an EIS. Alvarado referred to Elisabeth Stull. Stull, from Argonne National Laboratory, explained that an EIS would have to include surrounding facilities to the PGDP such as the Tennessee Valley Authority Shawnee Steam Plant. Donham said that the DOE is going to court in October for contempt against about 25 environmental groups because it had agreed in 1990 to do an EIS on waste management and environmental restoration. He said the DOE separated the environmental restoration part out and wrote the 2006 plan. Donham said that it might be more cost efficient for the DOE to decide to comply with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) right now at this site level. Stull said that programmatic EISs generally do not look at things in quite the level of detail as the site-specific EIS, so it is necessary to do a site-specific NEPA analysis along with the programmatic EIS. Vicki Jones opposed the proposal and said that she did not see spending the money it would take to prepare an EIS at this point. Jones said that she was sure the Environmental Protection Agency and the state would be watching the project closely and that these were not against the demonstration of Vortec. Donham's proposal as a recommendation was adopted by the board by majority vote.

The meeting minutes from the March 19, 1998, meeting were approved by consensus.

The next item on the agenda was comments on the 2006 Paths to Closure document. Donham asked if the state had changed its position since the letter on the uranium burial grounds. Alvarado said that the state and the DOE had not changed their positions and that the two organizations are negotiating. He further stated that there was a meeting in Atlanta this week which Dave Dollins attended and this issue

was presented. Donham said he had concerns about adopting cleanup standards for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Alvarado said that the cleanup standards are determined by a risk-based level and the standards depend on land-use scenario. Donham said that if there was 10 parts per million PCBs outside the plant fence, it could get into the environment. He also said that there is a strong potential that PCBs are bioaccumulating. Donham said that according to a January 22, 1993, memorandum from Richard Demond of the EPA, risks from beef and milk consumption can be a thousand times higher than risks from inhalation. Alvarado said that this was a valid concern and that bioaccumulation studies are being done to determine risk. Donham suggested that the board note that it does not accept the assumptions regarding the uranium burial grounds. Jones said that she had not received the letter to which Donham was referring and would like to hear the viewpoints from the DOE before making a decision. The board members agreed that the letter from the EPA was to be provided to members who did not have a copy. Dennis Hill said that there is a possibility that the comment period on the 2006 Plan may be extended by 30 days after the May 1 deadline. Donham said that the board needs to be supplied with all of the correspondence and the matter should be discussed at next month's meeting. In the meantime, he suggested that the board send a letter to Oak Ridge stating that the board's comments will be late. He also wanted the board to note that there is still a controversy between the state and the DOE on this issue.

The next item on the agenda was the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement on Depleted Uranium Hexafluoride. Ronnie Lamb said that if a conversion is made to Uranium 308 (U3O8), he suggests that it not be done at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant due to earthquake concerns. Craig Rhodes said he was in favor of the conversion; however, he thought the best solution would be to transport the cylinders out of the area for conversion due to earthquake concerns. Donham said that the conversion to uranium oxide is an attractive alternative, but money is a big problem. He said that one alternative might be to get the cylinders into an earthquake-proof storage facility. David Fuller said that he felt uncomfortable making policy on a "what-if" earthquake situation. He said he also felt uncomfortable with the DOE saying that everything is OK and would like the SSAB to find common ground with the DOE. Alvarado said there is a population of cylinders that is below specifications for transferring and his main concern is the process of corrosion on the cylinders. He said that this is why the cylinders are being painted. Lamb asked if the facilities under decontamination and decommissioning are going to be reworked. Alvarado said he did not see that as a realistic possibility. Rhodes asked what's the difference between fuel rods and U3O8. Alvarado said that there is no nuclear reaction going from U3O8. There was no proposal made on this agenda item.

Administrative issues were discussed; however, the members of the administrative committee were not present. Shelley Hawkins presented the board with information on a computer for consideration and informed the board that the Jacobs Environmental Management (EM) Team has sent purchase requisitions for office furniture and a lease agreement to Oak Ridge and is waiting on approval from the DOE contracting officer representative. Alvarado said that he is working on getting furniture at no expense to the SSAB from MK Ferguson, a subcontractor leaving the site that is willing to give the SSAB the furniture. The SSAB had no objections to this. Rhodes asked if the Jacobs EM Team could check on getting NT work station software since this is a little better quality than Windows '97. Jones also mentioned that the ink in the color ink-jet printer tends to dry out if not used everyday and asked if other printers and prices could be researched to give the board some alternatives. The board agreed that on the presumption that there was not another computer available from MK Ferguson, the computer presented to the SSAB by the Jacobs EM Team could be purchased.

Alvarado mentioned that there were a few changes about which the board needs to be informed since the Management and Integration Contract went into effect April 1, 1998. He said that the Jacobs EM Team is now a subcontractor to Bechtel Jacobs Company LLC instead of to the DOE and that the SSAB task would now fall under the Bechtel Jacobs public relations department. He said this should not affect the way the board functions and might possibly be a little better for the board in regard to the time it will take to get things done under the task. Alvarado also said that this was his last meeting since he was moving to Texas next month and that Myrna Redfield of the DOE would be his replacement as federal coordinator on the board. He said that board members can still directly contact Myrna Redfield, Dennis Hill, or Shelley Hawkins, as usual, when something is needed. Nola Courtney said thanks to Alvarado on behalf of the board for the time, effort, and energy he has given the SSAB. Jones also added that a letter from Edward Gray was received this week declaring his resignation from the board.

The next meeting will be held May 21, 1998, in the VanBuren Room at the Executive Inn. The meeting was adjourned.

Tentative agenda for the May 21, 1998, meeting:

- Minutes
- Information (Handouts)
- EMEF Project Updates
- Northwest Plume Five-Year Review
- DOE Response to SSAB Recommendations (15 minutes)
- Bechtel Jacobs Management and Integration Contract Presentation (30 minutes)
- Comments on the 2006 Plan (30 minutes)
- Administrative Plans for the Board
- Office Equipment and Computer (10 minutes)
- Lease Agreement (10 minutes)
- Board Evaluation (10 minutes)
- Review of the SSAB Draft Work Plan (10 minutes)

Action Items

- Provide board with correspondence between the state and the DOE concerning the uranium burial grounds
- Provide board with software alternatives (such as NT Work Station) and printer alternatives and prices for a computer
- Provide board with information on the Paducah Area Community Reuse Organization

Since several members of the public attended this SSAB meeting to comment on the Vortec Environmental Assessment, a transcript of the meeting minutes was made in addition to this summary in order to ensure comments were captured accurately.