



SRS Citizen's Advisory Board

Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board

Recommendation 221 Loss of Expertise to Support SRS Clean Up

Background

The Savannah River Ecology Laboratory (SREL) plays an important part in the remediation activities at the Savannah River site (SRS) and across the DOE complex. Environmental management decisions based in part on SREL's research have saved DOE and taxpayers significant life-cycle costs. SREL scientists are internationally known for research on remediating the effects of environmental contamination, restoring degraded habitats, and environmental stewardship. As a result of SREL studies, the Savannah River Site is the best ecologically characterized site in the DOE complex. SREL is actively contributing to environmental remediation, restoration efforts, and environmental stewardship on the SRS and elsewhere.

In addition, due to recent joint efforts by Georgia and South Carolina Congressional and Senatorial members, funding for SREL this fiscal year will be reduced instead of completely eliminated. All funding for SREL was cut last February when President Bush announced his budget request for the 2006 fiscal year. The US Department of Energy will provide \$4.5 million in funding plus an additional \$3.3 million in funding from University of GA, outside grants, and other federal agencies for a total funding level of \$7.8 million dollars for 2006 fiscal year, even though this amount is still much reduced from that provided each of the last three fiscal years. As a result there are currently 31 positions that have been identified for elimination from SREL's faculty. This figure could go higher for FY07 if funding is not appropriated at the current level, or higher, in order to keep SREL functioning with the same degree of expertise, experience, and professionalism.

Comments

The SRS Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) is interested in continuing to find cost savings associated with remediation activities and would like SRS to identify processes to accelerate the 2025 date for cleanup completion (Ref. 1). However, the SRS CAB is concerned about the loss of SREL capabilities and the impact that this loss of expertise will have on the projected waste site/closure process and schedule.

This loss of expertise is occurring at the same time that the SRS site operating contract is going through a re-bid. The SRS CAB questions how a change in a contractor may affect these same goals. Couple these items with a reduction in cleanup funds, and SRS could experience a

significant delay in the FFA schedule. Such a delay would be unacceptable to the SRS CAB. A similar reaction is expected from the regulators.

The loss of expertise at SRS is exacerbated by the continuing loss in work force and budget reductions. Furthermore, the SRS CAB has seen over the last several years a strategic decision by the current operating contractor to relocate personnel with certain SRS expertise to other contracts within the DOE complex. The SRS CAB questions whether the positions held by these people are identified as "key positions" in the operating contract and whether DOE is notified or has veto authority over such transfers. The overall general loss of site expertise is a growing concern of the SRS CAB and questions whether the site regulators (SCDHEC, EPA) the DNFSB, and other involved stakeholders might have similar concerns as to how the clean up work, now scheduled, can be completed as planned.

Recommendation

The SRS CAB recommends that:

1. DOE demonstrate to the SRS CAB on or before November 15, 2005 that:
 - a) the loss of SREL expertise will not impact projected waste site/area closure projects and schedules, especially the legally-enforceable schedules in the FFA.
 - b) the potential change in the SRS operating contract will not impact projected waste site/area closure projects and schedules, especially the legally-enforceable schedules in the FFA.
2. By this same date, SCDHEC and EPA provide any concerns about the loss of experienced remediation professionals at SRS and the potential slippage that this loss of resource could have on the FFA schedule.
3. DOE provide a definition of "key positions" in the SRS operating contract and describe the authorization procedures utilized before such personnel involved in deactivation and decommissioning or soil and groundwater closure projects can be transferred or relocated.

References

1. Citizens Advisory Board Recommendation No. 207 (adopted March 29, 2005), "Planning and Scheduling To Complete SRS Cleanup."

Minority Statement
From Karen Patterson and Arthur Domby
On
“Loss of Expertise to Support SRS Clean Up”

On September 27, 2005, the Savannah River Site (SRS) Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) approved the “Loss of Expertise to Support SRS Clean Up” recommendation presented by the Facilities Disposition & Site Remediation (FD&SR) Committee. We appreciate the time, proactive effort and insights of the FD&SR Committee. We also agree with the principles behind the recommendation, in particular that the DOE should be vigilant in assuring that expertise to carry out the SRS mission is not lost in the re-bid of the SRS operating contract. We also share the concern that the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory had its operating budget eliminated by the current Administration after five (5) decades of internationally-recognized scientific research and support by successive Administration of both major political parties. However, we did not vote for its approval and are submitting a Minority Statement to explain our reasons.

The specific recommendations tend to focus on the implementation of programs rather than the development of policy or programs. Our main discontent centers on recommendation (1)(b) and 3. We consider it premature to ask and impossible for DOE to “demonstrate” no potential impacts on projects and schedules associated with contract changes, at a time when future contract changes are not known or dimensioned. Finally, we would have preferred a DOE presentation to the CAB about the re-bid of the operating contract, and the factors addressed by DOE, including the specific risk addressed by the Recommendation, prior to consideration of this Recommendation.

Agency Responses

[Department of Energy-SR](#)

[DHEC Response](#)

[EPA Response](#)