



**Savannah River Site
Citizens Advisory Board**

**Recommendation 179
Inspector General Waste Solidification Building Report**

Background

Waste streams from the Plutonium Disassembly and Conversion Facility and the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility will be treated in a facility called the Waste Solidification Facility (WSB). This facility is expected to cost about \$58 million. The proposed WSB will produce several waste forms acceptable for disposal at existing sites around the complex. As part of its review of DOE's Plutonium Disposition Program which is managed by DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration (DOE-NNSA), see www.nnsa.doe.gov, the Inspector General conducted an audit to determine whether DOE has a complete plan to dispose of waste generated from the Plutonium Disposition Program (Ref. 1).

The audit report states that a complete disposal path for waste generated by the WSB has not yet been developed. Referencing DOE-NNSA's Conceptual Design Study, the report identifies three waste streams being produced at WSB over the 13-year life of the facility: 819,000 gallons of liquid low-level waste, 5,200 drums of solid low-level waste, and 17,000 drums of solid transuranic waste. The audit report further states that, beginning in 2007, DOE-NNSA proposes the three waste streams be transferred to DOE's Environmental Management (EM), which will subsequently treat or dispose of the waste. (low level liquid waste would be stored in the HLW tanks at SRS, treated in the ETF, and then disposed of in Saltstone; the solid LLW would be disposed onsite at SRS; TRU wastes will be shipped to WIPP.

DOE-EM's long-range plans contain no specific direction to receive, process, or dispose of the waste produced by the WSB, but, SRS is currently tracking the amounts of wastes in its site forecasts as part of its expected future waste streams. Furthermore, the projected amounts of wastes fit within SRS capabilities and will not have a significant impact on SRS operations. Apparently, the lack of formal agreement between DOE-EM and DOE-NNSA arises because the Assistant Secretary for EM has recently established a program objective to divest its holdings of most nuclear materials by 2006.

As part of the audit report, the IG discussed the inconsistency with DOE-NNSA and DOE-EM officials at both SRS and at DOE Headquarters. The report found no coordination between DOE-NNSA and DOE-EM about the waste disposition issue. Furthermore, while the exact amount of WSB waste was uncertain, the audit report disagreed with DOE-NNSA's position that it was premature to develop a plan and formal agreement to transfer waste from WSB to DOE-EM. One of the uncertainties expressed by DOE-NNSA is that it is considering the technical feasibility of converting the liquid waste stream into a solid stream, thus reducing the waste streams generated to only two. In conclusion, the report recommended that DOE-NNSA, in coordination with DOE-EM, establish a comprehensive and definitive program for the disposal of DOE-NNSA generated nuclear waste.

Comment

The SRS Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) has had numerous discussions the past several months about the lack of information concerning waste streams being generated by DOE-NNSA of which DOE-EM may have to treat and/or dispose. The SRS CAB believes the Inspector General's report is correct in identifying this planning inconsistency within DOE-HQ. The total lack of coordination is apparently based upon the management reaction to memorandums between DOE-NNSA and DOE-EM (see Ref. 1). The Assistant Secretary for EM states in her letter of May 15, 2003 that "NNSA is responsible for managing and disposing of the radioactive waste generated by its programs." DOE-NNSA states in its letter dated June 18, 2003 that "the DOE order assigns responsibility for ultimate disposal of waste to the

Assistant Secretary for EM not NNSA." Such lack of responsibility assignment appears to represent inefficient and ineffective control of its program by DOE-HQ.

The SRS CAB has been quite apprehensive from the very start when DOE-HQ announced that both DOE-EM and the newly created DOE-NNSA would share management of programs at SRS. The IG's report lends support and creditability to the CAB's concern that minimal coordination is taking place between DOE-EM and DOE-NNSA where there could be overlap in responsibilities. The IG's report also gives credulity to the CAB's belief that DOE-NNSA needs to be more open to and communicative with public stakeholders. In that respect, DOE-NNSA needs to amplify its efforts to have "give-and-take" communication with stakeholders where classification issues allow.

Recommendation

With construction scheduled to begin in December 2004, the need for a coordinated effort is urgent; therefore, the SRS Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) recommends the following:

1. DOE-HQ (Secretary Abraham) resolves the issue of WSB wastes between DOE-NNSA and DOE-EM related to which organization should accept responsibility for the treatment and disposition of newly generated nuclear waste from DOE-NNSA activities.
2. If DOE-SR is assigned the disposition of the WSB-treated waste, then DOE-SR formally include this task in the site's long-range plans and develop a cost and schedule baseline for its disposal.
3. DOE-HQ ensures proper communications between DOE-EM and DOE-NNSA and their stakeholders where overlapping responsibilities, per the example of who is responsible for DOE-NNSA waste at SRS, are adequately delegated at the planning level by DOE-HQ.

References

1. Audit Report on "Savannah River Site's Waste Solidification Building", Office of Inspector General, DOE/IG-IG-0618, September 2003.

Agency Responses

[Department of Energy-SR](#)