

Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance Nuclear Watch New Mexico

For immediate release. March 4, 2015

Watchdog Groups Praise NNSA Decision to Obey the Law, Prepare Supplement Analysis on Bomb Plant

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The National Nuclear Security Administration's disclosure that the agency "in the process" of preparing a Supplement Analysis for the much-changed Uranium Processing Facility (UPF) at the Y-12 nuclear weapons production plant brought praise from the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance (OREPA) and Nuclear Watch New Mexico. Just two days ago the two grassroots watchdog groups filed an expedited Freedom of Information Act request asking for the Supplement Analysis. At the same time the two groups noted that NNSA could be legally vulnerable without one. The issue is that the NNSA has proposed major changes to the UPF. The two groups contend that a Supplement Analysis is needed to determine whether or not past public review required under the National Environmental Policy Act needs to be supplemented because of those changes.

The UPF is a highly troubled project whose costs have exploded from an original estimate of \$600 million to more than \$19 billion by one Pentagon study. More recently, in order to keep costs down, the UPF's future mission has been stripped of dismantlement operations that would work off a backlog of unneeded nuclear weapons parts that need to be kept secure. Instead, the UPF will be a production-only facility for up to 80 "secondaries" per year, the components that give nuclear weapons immense thermonuclear capabilities. The UPF's original "big box" design has been abandoned, replaced by a number of smaller modular facilities, plus use of existing nuclear facilities that were previously deemed too unsafe for continuing operations.

"It's always a good thing when the government decides to obey its own laws and regulations," said Ralph Hutchison, coordinator of OREPA. "We had been told previously that a decision had already been made to proceed with the Uranium Processing Facility without preparing a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. We were surprised, because the law requires NNSA to complete and publish a Supplement Analysis in order to make that bigger decision."

Jay Coghlan, Executive Director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico commented, "The UPF bomb plant has already been delayed several times by bad management decisions and incompetent design work, which dearly costs the American taxpayer every time. Instead

of playing games about whether NNSA is or isn't going to comply with the law, the agency should do what it did here in Los Alamos—prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement after making major changes to a proposed nuclear weapons facility.”

“The cart and horse problem continues to bedevil this project,” Hutchison noted. “It cost us half a billion dollars in the space/fit fiasco, where not all planned uranium processing equipment could fit into the designed building, and for which no one has been held accountable. Now we have federal officials saying they are not going to do the environmental analysis until they have spent more hundreds of millions of dollars on the second go around for “conceptual” project design—even though new seismic hazard maps may show it is unsafe to build the plant where they want to. It’s a great plan if your goal is to hand out taxpayer dollars to giant defense contractors. But if you are trying to complete a project in a sensible and timely way, it’s completely backwards.”

NNSA did not indicate when the Supplement Analysis would be complete. The Oak Ridge Peace and Environmental Alliance and Nuclear Watch New Mexico will be closely monitoring the UPF process as it unfolds.

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NNSA’s admission that it is preparing a Supplement Analysis is reported at <http://knoxblogs.com/atomiccity/2015/03/04/nnsa-says-it-is-preparing-supplement-analysis/>