



Many Voices Working for the Community

Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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April 9, 2009

Local Advisory Board Representatives Travel to Georgia to Discuss DOE Cleanup Efforts

Twice a year representatives from advisory boards nationwide that provide input on the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Environmental Management (EM) Program gather to discuss issues and receive updates on the department's cleanup efforts.



ORSSAB Chair Steve Dixon chats with representatives from the Hanford Advisory Board Susan Leckband, left, and Shelley Cimon at the EM SSAB Chairs meeting.

The Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board (ORSSAB) is one of those boards, and in mid-March four of its representatives traveled to Augusta, Ga., for the spring semi-annual meeting.

“This is a good way for the various representatives to exchange information about what is going on at their sites. We can compare notes and see what common issues we may have that we can discuss and possibly come up with a common strategy for resolution,” said ORSSAB chairman Steve Dixon.

ORSSAB is one of eight of the federally chartered boards across the nation that provide advice and recommendations on DOE's environmental cleanup efforts at Oak Ridge; Los Alamos, N.M.; Paducah, Ky.; Portsmouth, Ohio; Richland, Wash.; the Savannah River Site in South Carolina, the Nevada Test Site, and the Idaho National Laboratory. The DOE EM Program is charged with cleaning up those sites that have areas of contamination as a result of nuclear weapons development or nuclear power research.

Four members of ORSSAB, Dixon, vice chair Ted Lundy, and members Darryl Bonner and Ed Juarez, made the trip, which included an all-day tour of the Savannah River Site on March 17 and the day and a half meeting, March 18 and 19.

The Savannah River Site is a 310 square-mile complex about 20 miles from Augusta in South Carolina that was built in the early 1950s for the purpose of producing tritium and plutonium-239 for nuclear weapons.

The business portion of the meeting began with remarks by Ines Triay, Ph.D., DOE Acting Assistant Secretary for EM. She has been nominated by President Obama for the position of

assistant secretary to succeed James Rispoli. Dr. Triay said even though the DOE EM mission is cleanup of legacy waste, the number one priority is doing the work safely. “The way we do our work is as important as the work we do,” she said.

Of the eight program priorities for EM four are priorities at the Oak Ridge Reservation and of interest to those who live and work in Oak Ridge: special nuclear material stabilization and disposition; the disposition of transuranic waste and mixed low-level waste; soil and groundwater remediation; and excess facilities decontamination and decommissioning. However, the last three of these four are at the bottom of the priority list. “These have been pushed aside normally because of funding problems,” said Dr. Triay, “but with money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) they should get more attention.”

She went on to say that ARRA funds will lead to more rapid footprint reduction at various sites, which will make land available for private development, or the DOE Energy Parks Initiative. The initiative is a nationwide effort to conduct research on developing alternative energy sources to reduce the nation’s dependence on foreign oil. ARRA money will not be used to develop the Energy Parks Initiative, however.

Dr. Triay said the EM program nationwide was receiving \$6 billion in ARRA stimulus funding. It has been announced that Oak Ridge will receive \$755 million from ARRA for cleanup work. She said utilizing ARRA funds will involve a high degree of transparency and accountability. Costs and schedules will be independently audited to ensure tasks can be achieved by the end of fiscal year 2011. “It is essential that the department be successful with money that has been entrusted to us,” she said.

She concluded her presentation by saying the challenge for EM will be to maintain its momentum of managing projects over several decades, conducting work safely, applying first-of-a-kind technologies, achieving footprint reductions and near-term completions, and maintaining a high-quality work force.

Frank Marcinowski, the DOE Deputy Assistant Secretary for Regulatory Compliance, said DOE in FY 2008 met nearly 90 percent of its enforceable milestones across the complex. There are more than 160 to be met in the current fiscal year, but some of those will be missed because of funding constraints. Most of the ARRA money won’t be available for use until 2010, but ARRA-funded projects will generate more waste for disposal in the next couple of years.

Marcinowski noted some concerns related to low-level/mixed low-level wastes, which could affect cleanup operations in Oak Ridge. Those concerns include increasing costs from scope and market conditions; potential challenges to DOE policies; the ability to address excess facilities with limited funding; potential natural resource damage; and inquiries outside of DOE for use of DOE facilities.

Other presentations included discussions by DOE officials on budget and engineering and technology development.

During the meeting each board had an opportunity to present issues of concern. The issues presented by ORSSAB included:

- Involving the SSABs nationwide in setting national EM priorities and putting more emphasis on risk reduction through decontamination and decommissioning of contaminated facilities.

- Identification and surveillance and maintenance of buildings that may have possible historical significance
- Stewardship responsibilities at ongoing mission sites – locally and across the DOE complex

Oak Ridge's stewardship issue generated quite a bit of discussion, and the representatives decided to include that on the agenda for additional discussion at the fall meeting. Stewardship is the responsibility of monitoring and protecting waste that has been disposed on site for multiple generations.

Representatives also decided to have a DOE representative talk more about how national priorities for EM are set at the next meeting, which will be held in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

The board representatives usually try to craft a recommendation to send to DOE. The Paducah board drafted a recommendation that nickel used in the gaseous diffusion process to enrich uranium be recycled for use in radiologically controlled environments. Tons of slightly contaminated nickel, which can't be sold on the open market because of the moratorium placed on these materials, is in storage at both Paducah and Oak Ridge. While the boards didn't act on the letter at the spring meeting it will be reviewed by the full boards across the nation and a revised recommendation will be presented at the fall meeting.

ORSSAB meets the second Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at the DOE Information Center, 475 Oak Ridge Turnpike, Oak Ridge. More information on the board is available at www.oakridge.doe.gov/em/ssab.