INSTITUTE FOR ENERGY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH

6935 Laurel Avenue, Suite 201
Takoma Park, MD 20912

Phone: (301) 270-5500
FAX: (301) 270-3029
e-mail: ieer@ieer.org
http://www.ieer.org

Statement of Steve Hopkins, *Snake River Alliance*
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Good morning, my name is Steve Hopkins and I work with the Snake River Alliance of Idaho, and I am here to discuss an issue that is of grave concern to the State of Idaho. We face the contamination of one of our most precious resources--the Snake River Plain Aquifer. The SRPA supplies 20% of Idaho's drinking water and is the lifeblood for much of our agriculture. For 18 years enormous quantities of dangerous plutonium contaminated waste has been dumped in unlined, shallow pits and trenches directly over the upstream end despite early warnings from the National Academy of Sciences. From 1952 to 1970 roughly 60,000 cubic meters of plutonium contaminated waste generated from nuclear weapons production and reactor research was dumped in 10 pits and 54 trenches with little or no concern for its environmental impact.

The storage containers, metal drums, and cardboard boxes, are not particularly robust materials, especially when confronted with moisture from snow runoff, and have since broken open. Plutonium has migrated at least 200 feet toward the aquifer and amercium was detected in the aquifer only 2 years after burial of waste was stopped in 1970. These findings prove the Atomic Energy Commision's assertions that radioactive contaminants would not migrate to be false and call for complete removal of the buried waste before further serious contamination results.

In 1991, DOE initiated the first large-scale effort to deal with buried plutonium waste. It proposed to remove TRU waste from one of the pits at our lab - our pit numbered "9". I say "our" because ultimately the land belongs to all Idahoans as well as the Shoshone-Bannock tribes. Though it is nominally the property of the DOE we will all have to live with the results of what DOE and its contractors do with this and other contaminated radioactive burial grounds.

The Contract

Pit 9 is one of the areas where there is a substantial amount of buried transuranic waste. DOE awarded Lockheed Martin Advanced Environmental Services with the remediation contract in 1994. Operations were set to begin in February 1997 and were to be completed one year later at a total cost of $50 million. The project has undergone substantial revisions and has turned into a tangled dispute. There has been no remediation, and to date Lockheed claims $257 million has been spent. The contractor now estimates remediation costs to be over $400 million in a

supposed fixed-priced agreement, and not so much as one plutonium contaminated glove has been unearthed. At this point, the first effort to remove and treat plutonium-contaminated waste in shallow land dumps above the Snake River Plain Aquifer has been ruined by contractor incompetence and an inappropriatre contracting arrangement.

LMAES demonstrated little knowledge of guidelines regarding the handling of nuclear materials. LMAES's two Pit 9 contracts (proof of process and actual cleanup) weren't linked in any way. Lockheed wasn't required to use the technologies it had demonstrated when it moved on to actual cleanup. It was as if a bakery got a contract because of its superb cheesecake recipe and then decided to deliver Twinkies. The shortcuts Lockheed tried to drag through this loophole would have likely resulted in worker exposure to radiation, created risks of a nuclear chain reaction during waste processing, and returned more waste to the pit than originally planned.

As for DOE, by privatizing the project they put themselves in the chair usually occupied by the public: it could comment on Lockheed's plans, but had no power to stop or even modify them. The DOE thus gave up control of a project it should have known would present never before-encountered hurdles.

Privatization/lessons learned

The troubles associated with Pit 9 should not be taken as grounds to scrap clean-up projects of its nature; I've already stated how important cleanup of buried plutonium waste is to Idaho's environment. There are lessons to be learned however. First, it is imperitive that nuclear waste cleanup should proceed from the public good and not private profit. This is an especially salient point when one considers the difficulty associated with the task at hand--it has never been done. Second, contracts of this nature do not allow for enough proper oversight, since cleanup is in the public interest, affected local communities should have more control over the process. In sum, privatization of daunting clean-up projects should be reevaluated.

The most common rationale offered for privatization thus far is cost savings, yet DOE can not offer any hard evidence of this claim, and in the case of pit 9, $257 million is claimed to have been spent with no excavation started let alone completed. Moreover, this project was started without coordination with another similar effort in Idaho--the proposed Advanced Mixed Waste Treatment Facility with a price tag of $800 million. This particular facility would treat the same types of waste treated in LMAES/Pit 9 facility, yet the costly redundancy was never addressed.

One of the institutional recommendations offered in IEER's report relates to creating a federally owned corporation responsible for remediating projects of Pit 9's nature. This corporation while Federally owned would carry out site-specific projects. These could possibly be overseen by local interests such as state officials, Indian tribes and citizen oversight committees.

WIPP

While the Pit 9 fiasco provides a hard earned lesson about the perils of privatization it also speaks to the need to conserve our scarce resources. There is no doubt that buried, uncontained TRU waste poses a greater threat to our Aquifer in Idaho than the comparable above ground

waste which is much better shielded from the environment. Therefore, a waste management project like the WIPP repository is an improper priority when one considers that it only addresses a part of the much more safely stored above ground waste at the expense of ignoring the far greater environmental threat that lies in the ground. DOE is doing the public a great disservice by selling the WIPP project as a means to clean-up waste problems when it does little more than shuffle waste to a new location--a new waste dump. Those of us living near the sites with the most TRU waste, Hanford, Idaho, Los Alamos, Oak Ridge and Savannah River all share the same concern--that buried TRU waste threatens our water supplies.

In Idaho, removal of buried waste and associated contaminated soil is essential in order to insure that we can drink uncomtaminated water and maintain a robust agricultural enconomy into the 21st century.