

NEWS MEDIA CONTACTS:
Joe Davis, 202-586-4940

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Thursday, January 31, 2002

Secretary of Energy Abraham Previews New Accelerated Cleanup Plan for Former Cold War Nuclear Weapon Production Sites

Department's Budget Creates New \$800 Million 'Expedited Cleanup Account'

FERNALD, OHIO – In a visit to the Department of Energy's Fernald, Ohio cleanup project, U.S. Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham today previewed the Department's new accelerated cleanup plan for the sites of former nuclear weapon plants that were crucial to winning the Cold War. The Environmental Management plan creates a new \$800 million "Expedited Cleanup Account" to be used by participating sites and is part of the overall program's \$6.7 billion request for basic cleanup at all sites that will be released with the entire DOE FY03 Budget request next Monday.

"When I took office, I was presented with the old plan for cleaning up the Department's Cold War nuclear sites, which called for a timetable of some 70 years to complete and at a cost of \$300 billion," Abraham said. "That is not good enough for me, and I doubt it is good enough for anyone who lives near these sites."

"So last year I called for a top-to-bottom review of the program, which has been recently completed. The result is this new plan that is targeted to swiftly clean up serious problems at sites and also reduce the risks to human health, safety and the environment," Abraham said.

The new proposal emphasizes three basic goals: eliminate significant health and safety risks as soon as possible, review remaining risks on a case-by-case basis working with state and local officials and develop strategies for remediation, and streamline cleanup so current funding will go instead to accomplishing real cleanup progress, rather than routine maintenance and other non-cleanup projects.

"This initial \$800 million Expedited Cleanup Account represents our current estimate of the number of sites likely to need new cleanup agreements this year. However, we are ready to expand this account with more money as additional sites move to expedited schedules," Abraham said.

Under the proposal, to have access to the Expedited Cleanup Account, a site and DOE will have to reach an agreement on an expedited schedule that shows measurable gains in addressing cleanup and important risks. A site that agrees to participate in the new expedited cleanup plan will receive more resources in the near term than in previous years. After the level of funding ramps up at one of these sites and problems are addressed, the level of funding will ramp back down. Once an agreement is reached there will be a roadmap for activity and budgets through Fiscal Year 2008, leading to predictable funding levels which the Department and the White House will consent to submit to Congress for the entire period of these agreements.

-MORE-

R-02-014

020125



“By cleaning up serious problems more quickly under the new plan, our communities will be cleaner and safer,” Abraham said. “The Environmental Management Program will be stronger and more effective in its mission of reducing health risks and expediting the environmental restoration of the nation’s nuclear sites. And there is an extra benefit to the taxpayers, because over the long run, the new plan will yield substantial savings on overhead, maintenance and security costs which the program estimates to account for two-thirds of the overall EM budget.”

“Working with the states and the regulatory agencies, DOE is proposing a new way of doing business, leading to greater accountability, responsibility, and opportunities for both the Department and the States,” Abraham said.

“Promoting compliance and ensuring that key milestones are met must be our focus. In some instances, we will set aside funds in escrow, not to be released until those milestones are met. And if they are not, then that money will be put toward cleanup and making things right.”

“Some will say the new approach won’t work. But those who want to continue with business as usual will be consigning their sites and communities to a slower cleanup of the most serious health and safety risks,” Abraham said. “Years ago, skeptics predicted that the cleanup of the Department’s Rocky Flats site would take 65 years and cost more than \$36 billion. Through innovative reforms, like those embraced in our plan, the Rocky Flats site will be cleaned up and closed 55 years ahead of schedule in 2006 for about \$7 billion - saving taxpayers nearly \$29 billion.”

Details of the Environmental Management’s accelerated cleanup plan will be released following the presentation of the Department’s Fiscal Year 2003 Budget on Monday, February 4.

Secretary Abraham’s remarks from today’s event will be available at the Department of Energy web site, www.energy.gov.

-DOE-

R-02-014



**Remarks by Spencer Abraham
Environmental Management
Program Reform Preview
Fernald, Ohio
January 31, 2002**

Good Morning and thank you for coming.

I am especially pleased to be here at the Department of Energy's Fernald site. Fernald, like many other DOE facilities, played a critical role to help win the Cold War for America. This particular site produced high-purity uranium metal products for our nation's weapon production program. And the nation is grateful for the commitment of this community and the men and women who work here.

Now some 50 years later, DOE --through its Environmental Management Program-- is responsible for the cleanup of Fernald and these various other sites around the country.

When I became Energy Secretary - a little more than a year ago today -- I was presented with the old plan for cleaning up these sites, which called for a timetable of some 70 years to complete and at a cost of \$300 billion. That is not good enough for me, and I doubt it is good enough for anyone who lives near these sites.

The program has involved many good people and good intentions. But a timeline of 70 years means decades of treading water on environmental hazards that need to be eliminated, not just managed. It's not fair to tell people who live near these sites that if everything works right, maybe their grandchildren will live in communities that are risk free.

Think about how you would handle an environmental hazard if it were in your backyard. You would clean it up quickly to prevent health and safety problems; you would not string out dealing with it and slowly clean up just a little every year. You would immediately assess the situation, identify the health and safety risks in order of importance and then begin to clean up the top priorities quickly.

Just as a go-slow approach would not be good for your family, the old environmental management cleanup plan is not good for our communities. And the old plan is not good for the environment either.

So last year, we began a top-to-bottom review of the environmental management mission. Our objective was to develop a new plan to swiftly clean up serious problems at sites and also reduce the risks to human health, safety and the environment.

After a year of review, I am pleased to announce today the new and improved Environmental Management Program's plan of action called, "Securing Our Communities: A Blueprint for Addressing Health Risks and Accelerating the Environmental Restoration of the Nation's Nuclear Sites."

Recently my team and I have had a chance to brief Governor Taft, Senators DeWine and Voinovich, and Congressman Rob Portman to fill them in on our findings and to spell out what they mean for

the future.

We will make the full report available to the public on Monday, February 4th, in conjunction with the rollout of our FY 2003 Budget. But in the meantime let me explain in broad terms what it says.

The new plan emphasizes three basic goals: 1) eliminating significant health and safety risks as soon as possible; 2) reviewing remaining risks on a case-by-case basis working with state and local officials to determine the most appropriate remediation schedules and approaches; and 3) streamlining cleanup so that funding spent on routine maintenance and security - which the program estimates accounts for two-thirds of the total EM budget--will be put to use for further expedited cleanup.

Further, this plan fully incorporates the Department's Homeland Security Strategy, which is to significantly accelerate the consolidation of nuclear material and waste into more secure locations and configurations.

This in depth plan is the product of an enormous amount of work by many dedicated people at the Department of Energy. This team was led by DOE's Under Secretary Bob Card and Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management Jessie Roberson. Jessie is here with me today. The EM team has developed an aggressive plan of action to change how the Department approaches its cleanup mandate, and Bob and Jessie will provide more detailed briefings for each site in the days ahead.

Next Monday I will be releasing the Department's budget. That budget will support our new approach and ensure these reforms can achieve success. I am pleased to announce today that our FY 2003 Budget request for Environmental Management will be \$6.7 billion. This budget will have two categories: one for basic funding at every site --- AND an \$800 million Expedited Cleanup Account out of which those sites who agree to participate in the new plan will receive additional funds to fast-track cleanup.

This initial \$800 million Expedited Cleanup Account represents our current estimate of the number of sites likely to need new cleanup agreements this year. However, we are ready to expand this account with more money as additional sites move to expedited schedules.

To have access to the Expedited Cleanup Account, a site and DOE will have to reach agreement on an expedited schedule that shows measurable gains and can be held accountable. Therefore, a site that agrees to participate in the new expedited cleanup plan will receive more resources in the near term than in previous years. After the level of funds ramps up at one of these sites and problems get addressed, the level of funding will of course ramp back down accordingly. And, once an agreement is reached there will be a roadmap for activity and budgets through the 2008 fiscal year. That means predictable funding levels - levels which our Department and the White House will submit to Congress for those years.

However, this new approach is about more than just increased budgets. Put simply, what I am proposing is a new way of doing business that brings with it responsibilities and opportunities - for both States and communities, and for the Department of Energy.

Certainly, the sites that participate in the new cleanup plan will be eligible for increased, accelerated cleanup funds going far beyond what some might have imagined possible even a year ago. However, there comes with this a responsibility to understand that this is not a license for unending cleanup, and open-ended budgets.

But the Department of Energy has to step up to the plate, too. I've had an opportunity to talk to Governors, state legislators and regulators, as well as our own environmental management teams at a variety of sites across the nation. And one of the disturbing aspects of these conversations has been the lack of trust among the parties.

Reviewing the history of cleanups at a variety of sites, as we did in our Top-to-Bottom review, leads one inescapably to the conclusion that the Department of Energy has entered into agreements, with aggressive milestones, that simply were not likely to be achievable. Promises were made, and then broken. Milestones were missed, cleanup was slower than expected, and the understandable frustration among states and communities grew and grew.

We have to change this. And, thus, one of the changes I am announcing is the following: We will ensure that agreements and milestones we set are achievable and realistic. We will take responsibility for carrying out those agreements and for successfully meeting our milestones. Promoting compliance and ensuring that key milestones are met must be our focus. In some instances we will set aside funds in escrow, not to be released until those milestones are met. And if they are not, then that money will be put toward cleanup and making things right. We will not use litigation to avoid responsibility. Where we are at fault, we will acknowledge that, and correct course. And I will hold my managers - whether federal or contractor employees - accountable for meeting our commitments.

Some will say that the new approach won't work. But those who want to continue with business as usual will be consigning their sites and communities to a slower cleanup of the most serious health and safety risks. Indeed, it wasn't long ago that people expressed skepticism about the new cleanup approach adopted for our Rocky Flats, Colorado site, and they were wrong.

Just a few short years ago, the cleanup of Rocky Flats was expected to take 65 years and cost in excess of \$36 billion. Through innovative project reforms similar to our new plan, Rocky Flats will be cleaned up and closed 55 years ahead of schedule in 2006. And as a bonus, the cleanup will be under budget at a cost of \$7 billion - a savings to the taxpayers of \$29 billion. Many of the ideas used to accelerate the Rocky Flats cleanup came from right here at Fernald, which pioneered the project-based cleanup process.

So we've learned a great deal from the Rocky Flats and Fernald experiences, and those lessons will be applied in our new plan of action.

We are confident this plan will work to expedite the cleanup and closure here at Fernald, improving the health and safety of the local community. With this approach, Fernald will be much closer to completing cleanup than it would be if we stayed with the old plan. In fact, the EM Program projects that Fernald can close by 2006, up to four years ahead of its current predicted schedule.

Rocky Flats and Fernald are the kind of success stories that convince me our goals are attainable, in far less than 70 years and at a cost far less than \$300 billion. By cleaning up serious problems more quickly under the new plan, our communities will be cleaner and safer. The Environmental Management Program will be stronger and more effective in its mission of reducing health risks and expediting the environmental restoration of the nation's nuclear sites. There is an extra benefit to the taxpayers, because over the long run, we estimate the new plan will yield substantial savings, on the order of many billions of dollars, given lowered costs for overhead, maintenance, security, etc.

We owe it to Fernald and the other communities for the sacrifices and contributions they made in securing victory in the Cold War. It is the last legacy of that struggle that we can address with true conviction and with our pledge to cleanup these sites. So we take to the task with renewed vigor, and we bring to it a renewed sense of this mission's importance.

Thank you for coming. Assistant Secretary Roberson and I will be available afterwards to answer any of your questions.

[Back to Previous Page](#)>