

OAK RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL PEACE ALLIANCE RESPONDS TO ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW BOMB PLANT PLANS

“While the rest of the nation tightens its belt, the NNSA in Oak Ridge is buying larger trousers.”

(KNOXVILLE, TN • 28 February 2011) The release of the Final SiteWide Environmental Impact Statement for the Y12 Nuclear Weapons Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee indicates the National Nuclear Security Administration in Oak Ridge continues to drift in an orbit farther and farther from reality.

The Preferred Alternative for a new nuclear weapon manufacturing facility is the “Capability-Sized Uranium Processing Facility,” a \$6.5 billion dollar bomb plant that will have the capacity to produce 80 thermonuclear secondaries and cases for US nuclear weapons.

Department of Energy insiders raised questions about the proposed UPF last week in Washington, DC, questioning the skyrocketing cost estimates and the slow pace of construction. One key point made by OREPA at the public hearing on the Draft SWEIS finally surfaced in DC: By the time the new bomb plant is finished in 2024, its proposed mission will have already been completed in existing facilities (which are themselves undergoing “modernization” at a fraction of the cost of a new facility).

The Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance is confident the UPF project will eventually fail under the weight of mounting opposition based not only on the exorbitant cost and the diminishing need, but also a growing recognition of the provocative nature of the new bomb plant. Heavy investment in weapon production facilities in the United States undermines our own nonproliferation efforts; a do-as-we-say-not-as-we-do policy in untenable.

A quick analysis of the Final SWEIS reveals that the NNSA dismissed concerns raised in the public comment period of the EIS process and downplays the destruction and disruption of wetlands areas as irrelevant to environmental concerns. (p.1-37). The NNSA did not include wetlands destruction, the construction of a haul road and concrete batch plant, or the excavation, transport and disposal of hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of soil in the Draft SWEIS and rejected public requests to reopen the SWEIS to allow full public comment when the information was disclosed. This deficiency may have opened the door for a legal challenge to the Final SWEIS.

The question now facing us is how much money we will sink in this ill-advised an increasingly unlikely project before it is abandoned in favor of a more cost-effective and efficient proposal—consolidating and downsizing production operations in an existing modernized facility, and constructing a dedicate dismantlement facility to meet the growing need in Oak Ridge.

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