

Meeting of the Decommissioning Project Community Workgroup (#26)
Tuesday, January 17, 2006
BGSU Firelands Cedar Point Center

The meeting began at 7:10 p.m. (following a two-hour, public meeting with Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission). Present were Workgroup members John Blakeman, Chris Gasteier, Rick Graham, Anne Hinton, Bill Ommert, Ralph Roshong, Sharon Schaeffer, Bob Speers, Dave Stein, Bill Walker, and Mary Warren. NASA representatives included: Olga Dominguez, Deputy Assistant Director of the Office of Infrastructure and Administration at NASA Headquarters; James Leatherwood and Mark Schoppet of the Environmental Management Division at NASA Headquarters; Bill Wessel, Glenn Director of Safety and Mission Assurance; Keith Peecook Acting Decommissioning Project Manager; Bill Stoner, Project Radiation Safety Officer (RSO); Rod Case, Assistant Project RSO; Frank Greco, Glenn Decommissioning Program Manager; Sally Harrington, Glenn Public Affairs Specialist and Ron Alexander, of Glenn's External Programs Directorate. Also present were Tom Dragoun, Chris Grimes, Brian Thomas and Patrick Isaac from the NRC; and Susan Santos and Michael Morgan of FOCUS GROUP. There were ten members of the public in attendance, including Perkins Township Trustees Tim Coleman and Bill Dwelle.

Opening Remarks

Bill Wessel provided welcoming remarks, noting that at Rep. Kaptur's public meeting, some attendees had asked questions about Decommissioning Project activities including waste packaging, shipping routes and disposal sites, and he suggested that project displays developed for the October 2005 Community Information Session be set up at future Workgroup meetings. He then introduced members of the NASA Team, including Olga Dominguez (who had given an extensive presentation on off-site sampling issues at Rep. Kaptur's meeting) before introducing Susan Santos of FOCUS GROUP. Susan asked the group for, and received, acceptance of the minutes from the October meeting, then briefly reviewed a "Welcome to 2006" packet – distributed to each member – that include the January meeting agenda. She noted that part of Keith Peecook's Project Update presentation was to include a report on off-site sampling – nearly identical to that given at Rep. Kaptur's meeting. Since that all Workgroup members in attendance had been at the latter meeting, Susan asked the group whether NASA should bypass the sampling presentation, to which members agreed. Susan then introduced Keith Peecook.

Project Update

Keith began his presentation by expressing his appreciation to the Workgroup members for attending Rep. Kaptur's meeting and said this participation "helps give (NASA) credibility." He reported on the status of the Decommissioning Project since the October Workgroup meeting, stressing, "The project has never stopped," and adding that "we're working in a more focused manner to answer questions...to help us reengineer the final parts of the project." Keith said "What's left in the buildings requires a more focused approach" to finish the project by its revised completion date of 2010. He said the

concentration now is on cleanup of the Hot Cells, as well as characterization of radiation throughout the Reactor Facility and the decontamination of embedded piping.

Hot Cells

Keith reported that the largest and most contaminated cell, Hot Cell, #1, was the “test case” in the approach to cleanup. He explained that NASA would be looking to determine whether the cells could be decontaminated to meet project cleanup levels. He added that last summer, an Evaluation Team was unable to determine whether NASA should undertake decontamination, or adopt a “rip and ship” approach, in which the Hot Cells would be demolished and shipped as low-level radioactive waste to the Envirocare licensed facility. He showed a cutaway drawing of the seven cells (noting that they had very heavy shielding as precaution in their former role as areas where the results of reactor experiments were analyzed). “Right now,” he observed, “We’re taking out all the loose and fixed equipment and decontaminating the walls of Hot Cell #1.” He also noted that workers would also remove a stainless steel liner from the cell, whose 12-foot-high and 4-5 feet thick walls have been sprayed with a “lockdown” component to keep any loose contamination in place.

Workgroup member Bill Walker asked about the “test case” and what the “test” would be. Keith responded that NASA needed more information, explaining there were “two basic options,” with one being to “go and spend time and money to clean up the contamination (i.e. decontaminate the cell) and prove it is clean,” then have the cell “surveyed for the Final Status Survey.” The other option, he observed, was “just to demolish it” and ship the rubble to Envirocare for disposal. Bill then asked how long it would take for NASA to make a decision, with Keith responding “within the next two or three months.” He said NASA needs to have a cost analysis to Headquarters by the end of February, adding that the test work being done will “tell us how hard it is to decontaminate,” and the cost for this effort vs. the disposal costs associated with just tearing down the cells and shipping all the material offsite for disposal.

Keith showed a slide of an entry hatch to the cell, which also showed the presence of a ventilation system inside the cell that keeps it at a negative pressure (to keep any airborne contamination from exiting the cell). Workgroup member John Blakeman asked about the air filtration system and Keith responded that it was a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filtration system (similar to what was used in the Containment Vessel during segmentation operations). He also said NASA plans to remove two 20-ton concrete “roof plugs” from the top of the cells once issues involving a crane are addressed. Keith pointed out that another challenge to Hot Cell cleanup was the presence of a number of electrical conduits to the cells, from which workers have pulled the wires, but that these must also be decontaminated.

Embedded Piping

Keith next reported on the decontamination of embedded piping throughout the Reactor Facility, noting that last summer, the Evaluation Team had determined that NASA could

clean the embed piping effectively. He said 7,000 feet need to be cleaned, with 1,400 feet cleaned to date. The piping ranges from three inches to 24 inches in diameter and includes what are termed “process pipes” from the former reactor. Work is currently progressing in the “pipe trench, located at the minus 25 foot level of the Reactor Building which was “a hub” where all the pipes entered the building. Keith said work was actually “slightly ahead of schedule” right now and anticipated that it would take ten months to complete. He showed slides of recent decontamination work, which he termed “delicate, detailed and careful,” and noted that yellow plastic lined the areas being cleaned, with decontamination workers wearing protective yellow suits. Most of the cleaning, he reported, is being done mechanically, using a probe on which is mounted a remote camera. Keith said the probe is pushed through the pipes and spins to clean the contamination, with a radiation detector mounted on the probe checking the pipe for contamination levels right after the cleaning. Keith also noted that there are other methods of cleaning, should they be necessary, including a high-powered vacuum that was used during last year’s “proof of process “ testing; and a 20,000 pounds per square inch hydrolaze, a water pressure washer, which would be used “in a severe case.”

Keith reported that representatives from the Oak Ridge Laboratory (ORISE) would visit the Reactor Facility next week to test the effectiveness of NASA’s decontamination work, noting, “Their job will be to prove that what we’re doing is accurate and acceptable, and that the results are legitimate. He added, “If there are issues with what we’re doing, then we can make the corrections right now.” According to Keith, the issue is “not just cleaning, but being able to prove that you cleaned (the piping),” adding that if Oak Ridge confirmed the decontamination procedures and results “are acceptable, that will give us a good feeling on going forward.” Keith allowed that “if you go back a couple of years,” NASA had concerns that there might be contamination in embedded piping “or piping in a 25 foot tall wall...that we could not clean...and that would be half the building that we’d have to take down.” But he added, based on the decontamination work done to date, “We think we can clean all the piping.”

Characterization

Keith said NASA has been conducting characterization efforts, “not just (off site) at Plum Brook” but at other locations off-site of the Reactor Facility. They included Plum Brook Station areas “where office trash had been stored,” and “known spill areas inside the (PBS) fence”; as well as the “burn area,” a 2-3 acre site about 2 miles south of the Reactor Facility – and a concrete disposal area located to the west of the Reactor Facility, where some waste concrete from the reactor was sent during the facility’s operations before being shipped offsite. Keith reported that all the results “came back clean.”

Keith did note that there was one area of the Reactor Facility where characterization has been “held up” – in the Containment Vessel quadrants and canals. Keith explained that NASA wanted to “look at concrete where the seams came together, with (at one time) 20-25 feet of water overhead.” But he said that the coating on these walls was “like a fiberglass wallpaper” an eighth of an inch thick, and the mastic material used for mounting this wallpaper on the wall contained asbestos, adding that an abatement contractor must remove the asbestos before NASA can drill core borings in the walls.

Once the borings are taken, Keith said the challenge will be to determine how deep in the walls any contamination might run. “If it’s three inches back, it’s no problem” to remove he said. “The question is if it (the contamination) way back” in the concrete, which might require the demolition and removal of the walls.”

Keith noted however, that there was a bright side to the delay in characterizing the quadrants and canals, in that two survey teams were reassigned to take advantage of mild winter weather and work on the Plum Brook off-site sampling. Keith noted that equipment used in site characterization, including hand-held meters, had been placed on a table in the Cedar Point Center meeting room. He said the meters “go over every square inch” of the Reactor Facility, pointing out that if a crew member “found something” (an area with elevated radiation levels)...we mark it and log it, and that’s where we’ll come back and do a core boring. He also said that NASA plans to do “a couple of hundred” core borings.

Off-site Sampling

While Olga Dominguez and Keith had given an extensive presentation on Plum Brook off-site sampling at Rep. Kaptur’s meeting, Keith provided some additional information for the Workgroup. Showing slides of December random sampling, he noted that the off-site sediment samples were taken with a shovel and placed in stainless steel containers, before being transferred to plastic bags – each with an identifying number, so “when it goes to the lab and they say ‘This sample shows such and such’, we will know exactly where it came from.” He added that where samples were split with the Ohio Department of Health (and subsequently, with the NRC as well) such that “they can come back and know exactly which sample it was matched up with.” He said the sampling that involves “very tight quality controls and a chain of custody” adding that “You have to be able to say exactly who touched it and how it was processed.”

NASA, said Keith, is analyzing the samples “in our own labs,” with 10% of the samples analyzed at certified, off-site labs, adding that the ODH lab has thus far analyzed 11 split samples (and will do more), while the NRC will also take some of the spit samples. To date, he said, NASA had analyzed more than 250 of the 521 samples taken – and that ODH sampling results have matched NASA’s, “so that’s a good first check.” He added that NASA expected to have additional results back by the end of February and would share this information at the April 25 Workgroup meeting.

Keith ended his presentation by reaffirming NASA’s commitment to the safety of the public, the workers and the environment, through to the completion of decommissioning and also noted that in December, he had sent Workgroup members a letter asking about their continued interest in serving [Note: Of the 14 members, 11 said they wanted to continue]. He observed, “This is our 26th quarterly Workgroup meeting...we appreciate your continuing support.” John Blakeman, a founding member from 1999, responded “I speak for myself but think I speak for everyone else...We have been extremely impressed by NASA’s forthcomingness and transparency. I accept your thanks but want to turn it back around, and thank you for your exceptional operations.”

Community Outreach Update

Sally Harrington reported that the January newsletter had been mailed to more than 2,300 recipients on the project mailing list and was available on a table in the meeting room – as were copies of the one-page fact sheet on off-site sampling, from the Rep. Kaptur meeting. Sally also reported that she would be recording an update on the Project Information Line this week, and also invited the Workgroup meeting participants and attendees to enjoy refreshments and additional discussion after the meeting. In addition, Susan said that in 2006, there would be two additional newsletters published – in June and October (three for the year instead of the previous four, given the pace of the project) – with another edition scheduled for January 2007. But she also said that, per the request of Workgroup members, there would continue to be quarterly Workgroup meetings.

Future Meetings and Topics

Susan mentioned the Workgroup meeting dates for 2006: Tuesday, April 25; Tuesday, July 25 and Wednesday, October 25 (to be followed by the project's annual Community Information Session). [Note: The date was subsequently changed to October 18]. She noted the hospitality that has been provided by Perkins High School principal Chris Gasteier and Huron Public Library Director Anne Hinton (both Workgroup members) who have hosted several Workgroup meetings and urged members to contact Michael Morgan of FOCUS GROUP if they had any suggestions on other possible meeting venues.

Susan also asked members for topics that they would like to have discussed at future Workgroup meetings. Member Rick Graham asked about a presentation on how NASA monitors and determines health risks from, radiation, with Frank Greco suggesting that such a presentation could be framed around the different types of radiation –Alpha, Beta, Gamma. Workgroup member Bob Speers added that such a presentation also include a discussion of chemical risks, mentioning the Plum Brook Ordnance Works cleanup project. Rick Graham observed that “levels of science and technology are now so much more advanced than they were in the 70’s,” when the Reactor Facility was shut down, adding that it was only because of the advanced instrumentation NASA used in monitoring Pentolite Ditch and Plum Brook that any off-site contamination was detected. Bill Walker offered to bring to such a presentation some of the radiation detection equipment that he employs with the Erie County Emergency Management Agency. Susan Santos added that the project displays on low-level radioactive waste transportation and disposal could also be set up at a future meeting.

John Blakeman observed that Sandusky city officials have expressed concerns about water quality as a result of the Plum Brook off-site contamination, and suggested that NASA continue to provide information on water quality and monitoring through to the end of the Decommissioning Project in 2010. Keith said he had received a letter from Sandusky City Manager Mike Will on water issues in Pipe Creek, had provided him with

information and assurances that it has been monitored and was not subject to any Plum Brook contamination – even in the event of severe rainstorms – and had not heard any follow-up questions from Mr. Will. [Note: Sandusky City Commissioner Dave Waddington had expressed similar concerns at Rep. Kaptur’s meeting, which Keith had answered.] Keith noted that much of NASA’s new sampling plan had its roots in the questions brought to him by Workgroup members, which he said was an example of the “two-way communication” the panel brings to the project. Susan added that NASA would do another presentation on the project’s environmental monitoring program in October and that the latest reports were available, and would be distributed to members.

Given several suggestions made by Workgroup members regarding questions that community members might ask, Susan asked the Workgroup to review the updated Frequently Asked Questions, which had been recently posted on the Decommissioning Project Website, to determine if more/updated questions and answers should be added. Rick Graham suggested that, based on discussion at Rep. Kaptur’s meeting, a question and answer be added to the effect that every current and former Plum Brook Station Reactor Facility employee (including those working on the Decommissioning Project) have radiation exposure records available to them at Plum Brook Station. Workgroup member Sharon Schaeffer, who is Community Health Coordinator for the Erie County Health Department, suggested that the wording of this Q&A also include the recommendation that current/former PBRF workers bring their records to a doctor or health physiologist to “provide the correct interpretation.” NASA retiree Len Homyak expressed the concern that these records would be private, so Susan suggesting a wording on the question/answer, to the effect of “I worked at the Plum Brook Station Reactor Facility. Was I exposed to radiation?” Keith pointed out that every current and former PBRF worker had an exposure record on file at Plum Brook Station and due to “privacy act controls,” they can be shared only with the individual worker requesting it.

Susan noted that several Workgroup members had, in recent months, had brought community questions to NASA and she asked them to continue to let NASA and FOCUS GROUP know when they hear them, so that we may better track and respond to the questions, adding that NASA would continue to frequently update the Information Line and Website. She further noted that, in response to Keith’s December letter, three Workgroup members were leaving the panel, and asked members to contact Michael Morgan with any suggestions on new candidates.

The meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.