

OAKRIDGER

EM chief: New waste disposal facility needed

By Jay Mullis Posted Sep 11, 2018 at 5:20 PM

The Manhattan Project, established in 1942 as a critical part of the effort to win the Second World War, ranks among the greatest examples of ingenuity and determination in American history. In less than three years, Oak Ridge's dedicated workforce constructed hundreds of buildings across more than 60,000 acres in East Tennessee, including some of the largest and most complex in the world.

Seventy-five years later, many of those same buildings present a different challenge. They are old and deteriorating and are littered with equipment and hazardous materials that must be removed in order to ensure the long-term protection of our community, workers, and the environment.

For more than two decades, the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management has been responsible for the safe and efficient cleanup of those contaminated facilities, and we have made enormous progress. We are nearing completion of cleanup at the former K-25 site, which is transitioning into a premier industrial park that supports statewide economic growth and prosperity.

Additionally, due to strong support from our congressional leadership in Washington, we have begun addressing the growing risks at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and Y-12 National Security Complex.

Much of our success is credited to the availability of an onsite engineered waste disposal facility that can accept soil and building debris with low levels of contamination. This facility has been one of the most significant contributors to our success and pace of cleanup — saving nearly \$1 billion and eliminating the risks associated with cross-country travel. Meanwhile, we remain committed to sending the most highly contaminated waste out of state for disposal.

After 15 years of safe operations, the current disposal facility is nearing its capacity. In order for us to continue our progress without interruption, we must construct a new onsite waste disposal facility that can accept waste from Oak Ridge's remaining environmental cleanup. This proposed facility, which would be much like our existing one, will also be carefully engineered to protect the surrounding land and water from contamination, while safely containing the demolition debris of the aging, deteriorating buildings that pose an immediate risk to our employees and the community.



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While there has been some discussion around this topic already, we are preparing to engage the public directly through a series of public meetings. These community meetings will primarily focus on the proposed location of the new facility, what waste and debris might be placed into the facility, and what it means for Oak Ridge cleanup if a new facility is not built. The valuable input we receive from you will guide us as we work to rid Oak Ridge of the environmental legacies left from past operations to enhance safety and open new doors of opportunity for the region.

The Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management takes its responsibilities as seriously today as those workers who helped bring an end to World War II and the Cold War. We are making great strides in our environmental restoration efforts, and we want to continue that progress. We believe that is only possible if we have a safe, efficient way to dispose of the waste generated from cleanup. We look forward to engaging you in this discussion, and ask for your participation and open-mindedness as we present our proposal.

Jay Mullis is the U.S. Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management manager. As advertised Monday, a public meeting at which citizens can comment will be on Thursday Sept. 13 from 4:30 to 6 p.m. in the DOE Information Center located at 1 Science.gov way in Oak Ridge.