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# Says new onsite waste disposal facility critical to Oak Ridge environmental cleanup completion

By Kenneth R. Rueter/Special to The Oak Ridger Posted Sep 28, 2018 at 3:22 PM

OAK RIDGE — Our historic cleanup of the East Tennessee Technology Park (ETTP) is enhancing Oak Ridge’s safety and providing the community with land to attract private industry for redevelopment.

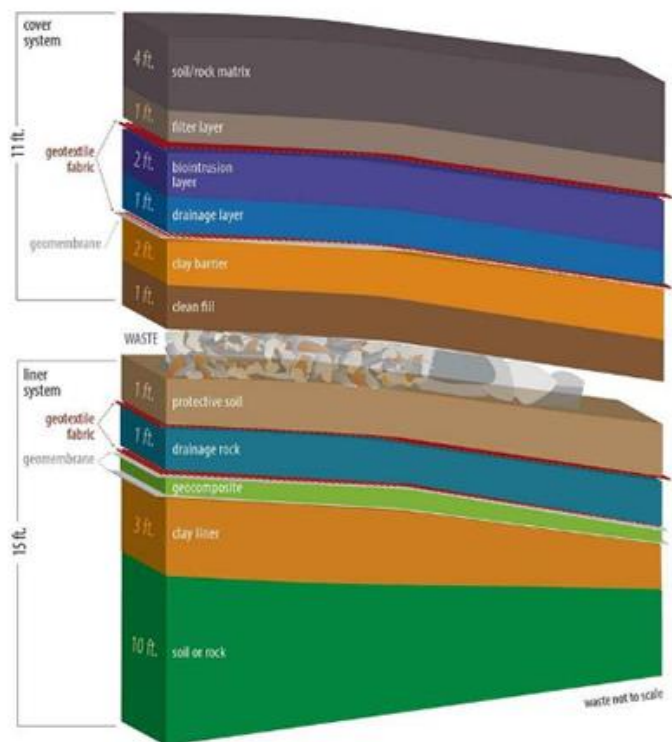
As one of the U.S. Department of Energy’s largest ever cleanup projects, it is positioned to soon be one of the agency’s biggest success stories when we complete facility environmental cleanup in 2020.

This remarkable achievement is made possible through our dedicated workforce, strong federal partnerships, sustained congressional support and a key piece of infrastructure—the engineered onsite disposal facility known as the Environmental Management Waste Management Facility (EMWMF).

The current facility has allowed us to eliminate risks and complete ETTP building deactivation and demolition much sooner by eliminating the cost and time associated with tens of thousands of nuclear waste shipments crossing the country. Instead, trucks leave our demolition sites and travel eight miles on a private haul road to unload building debris and soils.

This approach has avoided almost \$1 billion in additional waste management costs and directed a much higher percentage of funds toward removing existing hazards, reducing environmental risk and accomplishing more cleanup.

With the scale and pace of cleanup at ETTP, we have generated a significant amount of waste, which is pushing EMWMF toward full capacity. Within the next five to ten years, the facility is expected to reach its capacity



This diagram shows a proposed design for the EMWMF which will include debris from Oak Ridge DOE plants. The waste is not to scale. - DOE/Special to The Oak Ridger

with the final waste from the ETPP and excess contaminated facilities cleanup, which has started at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the Y-12 National Security Complex.

UCOR has relied heavily on the availability of onsite disposal facilities in its approach to managing waste. Future cleanup is threatened without another facility that provides the capacity needed to finish cleanup in Oak Ridge.

If we had not had an on-site disposal option for ETPP cleanup, our 1,800-person workforce, along with the \$1 billion in subcontracting we awarded — much with small, local businesses — would have been directly impacted. Work would have slowed, costs would have increased and Oak Ridge's highest risks would remain.

Having available onsite disposal space will be necessary to efficiently and safely achieve cleanup as the mission shifts to removal of excess contaminated facilities at ORNL and Y-12 and mercury remediation at Y-12, where 2.75 tons of elemental mercury has already been removed and disposed of off-site. As we learned from our work at ETPP, the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of onsite disposal allows for timely deactivation and demolition of facilities that would only continue to degrade and pose risks to workers and the environment.

Fortunately, the U.S. Department of Energy is proposing to construct and operate a new, engineered onsite disposal facility known as the Environmental Management Disposal Facility in Central Bear Creek Valley near Y-12 and the existing disposal facility — EMWMF. The near-term availability of this new repository is critical to large-scale cleanup efforts planned across the Oak Ridge Reservation, including the removal of 75-year-old aging excess, contaminated and deteriorating buildings at ORNL and Y-12.

The agency has a proven record of safely operating the existing landfill during the past 16 years. Together, we have adhered to the strict regulatory criteria that govern what types of waste are accepted and disposed of onsite.

These wastes are mostly comprised of building debris and soil that contain minimal contamination and meet onsite waste acceptance criteria for disposal. In fact, approximately 95 percent of the volume of cleanup waste is disposed of onsite, while 90 percent of the total radiation contamination is shipped out of state for disposal.

Safe operations and continuous regulatory monitoring are the guiding principles of our landfill operations. Like the existing landfill, the new one will be built to the highest engineering standards incorporating appropriate safeguards to protect the public and the environment; and the highly contaminated waste will continue to be disposed of outside of Tennessee.

The UCOR team is proud of its record in the safe, environmentally compliant disposal of waste. Onsite disposal has proven to be a safe, beneficial solution. We should continue to rely on this essential resource to reduce risks across the Oak Ridge Reservation, support important research and national security missions, maintain stability in employment, and open new doors for economic opportunity in the region.

Kenneth J. Rueter is President and Chief Executive Officer of UCOR, an AECOM-led partnership with Jacobs, in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.