



Public-Private Panel Serves Up ‘Hot Topics’

WASHINGTON, D.C. – [EM](#) and its stakeholder and industry partners have responded to COVID-19-related challenges that few if any could have foreseen just six months ago, according to participants at the National Cleanup Workshop.

Betsy Connell, EM’s Associate Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Regulatory and Policy Affairs, and Dae Chung, Associate Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Corporate Services, provided the federal perspective on a panel devoted to EM “hot topics,” including the pandemic response that was activated just shortly after the cleanup industry’s last major gathering, the Waste Management Symposia held in early March in Phoenix. Likewise, industry and community panelists talked about what’s on their plates in light of the current operating environment.

Chung said the pandemic has prompted EM to respond creatively and cooperatively while maintaining safety and following COVID-19 guidelines.

“While it’s not ideal, what we are seeing is innovation — creative solution-making by working together,” Chung said. “I think this environment has forced us to work with better collaboration.”



Dae Chung, EM Associate Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Corporate Services

Karen Wiemelt, senior vice president and general manager of Jacobs, said she was surprised by how quickly the industry adapted to teleworking.

“I actually think in some respects we’ve been able to reach a lot more people through videos, involving more people than we normally would have,” she said.

Mark Whitney, executive vice president and general manager of Amentum, offered, “The projects also were able to take advantage of the different environment — things like implementing backlog reductions, as well as instituting improvement initiatives that could be completed remotely.”



Rick McLeod, CEO of the Savannah River Site Community Reuse Organization, said he worried, however, about impacts of increased telework on commercial real estate near EM sites. He also wondered how many retirements might be forthcoming due to the relative strength of retirement investments, asking rhetorically: “How many (workers) are going to come back?”

Looking forward, panelists offered predictions on issues likely to be topics of discussion at next year’s National Cleanup Workshop.

“We’re at an inflection point with respect to the startup of the three processing facilities and we’ve made the point about progress on tank waste, which is our largest component of environmental liability,” Connell replied. “But also there is the high-level waste interpretation — dispositioning tank waste by characteristic rather than where it came from.”

Chung said he is looking forward to startup of the Integrated Waste Treatment Unit (IWTU) at the Idaho Site, as well as operations that will be underway at the Salt Waste Processing Facility (SWPF) at the Savannah River Site. Whitney said with the SWPF coming online soon, “more tanks are going to be emptied faster, and that’s going to give us more breathing space and allow EM to move forward with tank closures quickly.”

Whitney and his colleagues touched on a number of other ongoing and upcoming projects, including at Oak Ridge and Hanford — notably the latter’s Direct-Feed Low-Activity Waste (DFLAW) construction project turnover to commissioning.

Betsy Connell, EM Associate Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Regulatory and Policy Affairs



Connell named potential site closures in the years ahead, including possibly completing uranium mill tailing transfers at the Moab Site and the legacy cleanup at the Nevada National Security Site, along with other items in the EM Strategic Vision. And she announced that nine of the 10 current building demolitions at the Energy Technology Engineering Center in California are now completed.



"I'm also excited about being able to get started with the first GDP (Gaseous Diffusion Plant) process building demolition at Portsmouth next year," Chung added. "Also, I should mention at **West Valley**, I think we will get the Main Plant Process Building demo started up hopefully early next year."

Greg Meyer, senior vice president of Fluor, identified other milestone opportunities in addition to getting IWTU up and running to process radioactive waste, and starting demolition of the X-326 Building at the Portsmouth Site.

"There's an opportunity to ship a lot of waste next year," Meyer said.

-Contributor: Brad Mitzelfelt