

Draft SEIS on Phase 2 West Valley cleanup due next year

By RICK MILLER

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WEST VALLEY — The draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Phase 2 decision on cleanup at the West Valley Demonstration Project will be published in 2023.

A decision on the Phase 2 cleanup probably will not occur until 2025, a spokesman for the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority told those attending a quarterly public (virtual) meeting for the West Valley Demonstration Project on Wednesday.

Lee Gordon, the NYSERDA spokesman, said when released next year the draft SEIS will provide for extended public comment with a six-month comment period.

The West Valley Demonstration Project is the cleanup of the country's first nuclear reprocessing facility. It operated in the 1960s and early 1970s to reprocess spent nuclear fuel rods.

Since 1980, when the West Valley Demonstration Project Act was passed and signed by President Carter, the U.S. Department of Energy has spent about \$3 billion on the cleanup and NYSERDA about \$300 million.

Depending on the extent of the cleanup, the cost could exceed \$10 billion.

While the highly contaminated main process building, due to be demolished beginning later this year, is the focus of Phase 1 of the cleanup, it is the tip of the iceberg.

The Phase 2 decision will decide whether to remove huge underground steel tanks that contain radioactive sludge and other material and low-level radioactive waste in two on-site landfills — one the State Disposal Area controlled by NYSERDA and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission federally-licensed site.

The West Valley Citizens Task Force has been working for an unrestricted release of the West Valley site for more than 25 years.

The Task Force wants all the radioactive material removed from the site to protect public health and eliminate the possibility that materials from the landfills or the underground tanks end up in the Great Lakes. Members of the Seneca Nation have also expressed concern over leaving anything at the WVDP site.

The task force is still waiting for detailed information on erosion modeling of the site decades, even centuries into the future. Some of the radioactive material has a half-life of thousands of years.

Gordon said final scoping for the Phase 2 cleanup shows that "a vast majority of the waste" removed during cleanup would have a disposal pathway today. A very small amount of "orphan waste," or waste with no current off-site storage possibility is likely, he added.

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Bob Steiner, a CHBWW groundwater technician, also spoke during the quarterly meeting Wednesday about the 800-foot permeable treatment wall filled with zeolite that intercepts strontium 90 in the groundwater and treats it before discharging water free of the radioactive element

The strontium 90 is leaking from the foundation of the main process plant from a spill nearly 50 years ago.

The permeable treatment wall is a trench 30 feet deep in some places. Filled with zeolite, which looks something like kitty litter, the wall was installed in 2010 and continues to do its work as an ion exchange, Steiner said.

It was designed for a 20-year life, he said. Data from a series of wells on both sides of the wall show it is reducing the level of strontium 90 when it passes through.

Steiner said there are places where the zeolite in the permeable treatment wall is no longer working at optimum capacity. There are some places where additional zeolite could be added to beef up the efficiency.

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