



## EM Responding to Challenges, Positioning for New Era, Mullis Says at Conference



*Jay Mullis, EM acting associate principal deputy assistant secretary for regulatory and policy affairs, served as the keynote speaker at the 2022 RadWaste Summit, an annual conference focused on cleanup.*

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**LAS VEGAS** – [EM](#) has emerged from a challenging period with achievements under its belt and now is positioned for a new era of sustained progress in environmental cleanup, a program leader told a stakeholder and industry audience last week.

As it dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic, “EM continued its important mission and realized a set of pivotal accomplishments across the country. It is thanks for many of you here today that we achieved these accomplishments



and positioned EM for a new era,” said Jay Mullis, acting associate principal deputy assistant secretary for regulatory and policy affairs.

“I’m optimistic that building on our accomplishments, we can work this year to address some longstanding issues and advance EM further into this new era of steady and sustained progress for years to come,” Mullis said.

The EM official served as the keynote speaker at the 2022 RadWaste Summit, an annual conference focused on cleanup. A number of EM field managers and other program representatives also participated in the event.

In his June 8 remarks, Mullis recounted EM’s recent progress on key initiatives, such as beginning treatment of tank waste at the [Hanford Site](#) through the Tank-Side Cesium Removal System; a focus on emptying tanks at [Savannah River Site](#) (SRS) with operations well underway at the Salt Waste Processing Facility; advancements in drawing down legacy transuranic waste at the [Los Alamos National Laboratory](#) and other sites; and skyline changes at [Oak Ridge](#), [Portsmouth](#), the [West Valley Demonstration Project](#) and the [Energy Technology Engineering Center](#) through progress in facility deactivation and decommissioning.

“As individual milestones, they are impressive, but together they are important and more impressive because of how they position the EM program today and for the future,” Mullis said. “EM is now in a position to focus on ‘clearing the decks,’ so to speak, and tackling major hurdles to sustained success.”

Mullis said EM challenges include:

- Defining a path forward for key sites like SRS and the [Waste Isolation Pilot Plant](#) so they remain integral to DOE’s national security and research missions.
- Developing a realistic and achievable approach to waste vitrification at Hanford, building upon the Direct-Feed Low-Activity Waste ([DFLAW](#)) approach.
- Strengthening relationships with regulators and stakeholders in key states.
- Building a high-quality and diverse workforce to fend off a “silver tsunami” of pending retirements among aging personnel.

“These are not going to be easy decks to clear,” Mullis said. “But we believe now is the time to try, and we are committed to setting this course for the program.”

EM field managers Connie Flohr of the [Idaho Cleanup Project](#); Joel Bradburne of the [Portsmouth/Paducah Project Office](#); Reinhard Knerr of the Carlsbad Field Office, which operates WIPP; and Laura Wilkerson of the Oak Ridge Office of EM delivered updates on progress at those sites and their work ahead. Angela Watmore, acting deputy assistant secretary for acquisition and project management, discussed the goals of the program’s “end-state contracting” approach. Lois Jessup, EM director of program planning, updated the audience on EM project and program management.



*Kristen Ellis, EM senior advisor for STEM and talent acquisition.*

*Joceline Nahigian, EM director of intergovernmental and stakeholder programs.*



Underscoring the importance of workforce development, EM Senior Advisor Kristen Ellis spoke on the program's emphasis on recruiting and nurturing new talent, and encouraging student interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields.



“STEM and workforce and succession planning and future of work and all of those things get tied together very quickly,” said Ellis, who fills a new position as head of STEM and talent acquisition.

Ellis noted there are only 15 EM employees across the workforce of roughly 1,200 people who are younger than 30, a striking statistic that is driving EM’s urgency to develop a new generation of professionals in mission-critical jobs.

“We will need a workforce of the future with an increased focus on diversity, equity and inclusion,” Ellis said. “It will require cutting-edge innovation to help us meet those needs. We need to create an environment that will attract and develop and retain the diverse and talented next-generation workforce. We are focusing on increasing our efforts in those areas.”

On a panel discussing public and community engagement, Strategic Communications Specialist Stephan Tetreault noted EM was established during a period when DOE’s culture was changing to increase public knowledge of its activities and foster new openness and accountability. He described the tools and methods EM employs to engage with its audiences.

“Engagement is in EM’s DNA,” Tetreault said. “I don’t think we would be going too far out on a limb to say EM has perhaps the most developed and practiced communications in the Department.”

Joceline Nahigian, director of intergovernmental and stakeholder programs, said EM strives for transparency in its relations with stakeholders. She encouraged the audience to “always stay in touch with EM.”

“Everything we do in EM, we are transparent about it,” Nahigian said. “You want to know where we’ve been? Go to our website. We have a detailed history. You want to know where we’re headed? Go to our website, we have our vision there.”