

Recommendation 322

Updates Provided to the Citizens Advisory Board at the Bi-Monthly Committee Meetings and
Via Email

Background

In recent months several situations have arisen at the Savannah River Site that the Board first became aware of by reading Aiken, Augusta, and other local newspaper stories; viewing news programs on the Augusta television stations; or via email from Site stakeholders who read trade journals. For example, the Board was unaware of a series of safety concerns that had been raised by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board until an article was published in the *Augusta Chronicle*. The Board was also unaware that a new technology was being installed that would reduce the possibility of the build-up of hydrogen in the Liquid Waste System, thereby reducing the risk of an explosion, until an article was published in the *Times and Democrat*. The Board did not become aware that the Director of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control had written a letter to Secretary Moniz of the Department of Energy, threatening to enforce millions of dollars in penalties for failure to meet important High Level Waste cleanup milestones, until an article was published in the *Aiken Standard*.

Most recently, the Board was unaware of the possible shipment of used nuclear fuel containing highly enriched uranium from the Federal Republic of Germany, until it was mentioned during the Public Comment period at the May 2014 Board meeting. It wasn't until an email was sent to the Board on June 4, 2014, containing a *Federal Register* announcement, that the Board was given any details of the pending project. In addition, even though the Board had two bimonthly committee meetings the day before the Department was scheduled to hold a public meeting on this possible receipt of used nuclear fuel from Germany, the Board was not given an update on the situation.

Comments

From the examples above, it can be seen that some of the "situations" have involved safety concerns, clean-up delays, or receipt of nuclear material, but others were important accomplishments at the Site. In order for the Citizens Advisory Board to be able to provide meaningful input and meaningful written recommendations to the Department of Energy, its members need to be informed of situations at the Site in a timely manner. The failure of the Department to do such is threatening to erode public trust and hampering the effectiveness of the Board. The Department's lawful commitment to transparency requires a more forthright approach.

The usual method for communication between the Department and the Board is through formal presentations at the bimonthly Board meetings, bimonthly committee meetings, or during the "agency update" portion of the bimonthly Board meeting. Unfortunately, these methods have failed to provide Site information that is important to the public in a timely manner.

Key information about the Site could be delivered in a timely manner by simply building on existing communication methods between the Department and the Board, resulting in an increased opportunity for open dialogue and developing a stronger relationship.

Recommendations:

Given the pressing nature of this issue, the Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board recommends that the Department of Energy:

1. Provide updates at the regular Citizens Advisory Board's bimonthly committee meetings.
 - a. These updates should be provided by the designated Department of Energy liaison to each issue-based committee.
 - i. These updates should be patterned after the "Agency Update" format used at the Citizens Advisory Board's Full Board Meetings.
 - ii. These updates should be brief and informal, with the option of a PowerPoint presentation or handout, and be followed by a question and answer session.
2. Provide updates via email to the Citizens Advisory Board.
 - a. These updates should be sent when a situation arises at the Site and waiting could mean that information could appear in the press before the Board is informed in a meeting environment.
3. Provide news releases relevant to the Site via email to the Citizens Advisory Board.
 - a. These news releases should be sent at the same time that they are posted on www.srs.gov or at the same time they are sent to news media.