

WM2009 Conference Panel Report

Panel Session 02: US DOE Hot Topics in Environmental Management

Panel Reporter – Linda Ulland, University of Minnesota, USA

The Panelists were:

- Merle Sykes, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Program Planning
- Frank Marcinowski, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Regulatory Compliance
- Mark Gilbertson, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Engineering and Technology
- John (Jack) Surash, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Acquisition and Project Management
- Dae Chung, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Safety Management and Operations
- Desi Crouther, acting Director, Human Capital Planning
- Jim Fiore, Director, Office of Management Analysis

It's a good year to be in Waste Management! That's how EM Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for Program Planning Merle Sykes started her panel presentation Monday morning. "It is busy and exciting times," she said.

The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2008 is largely responsible for that, and each of the panel participants mentioned how the Recovery Act will support their work. "We are looking at better ways to use the dollars we have," she said. "We need to make the best use of taxpayer dollars reducing risk and maintaining compliance."

Environmental Management expects to receive \$6 billion from the Recovery Act, added to the nearly \$6 billion in the Omnibus bill. The focus of work will be on keeping planned projects on track and using additional resources for "shovel ready" projects for maximum return on dollars.

Frank Marcinowski, DAS for Regulatory Compliance identified the recent successes and continuing challenges and how the implementation of the Recovery Act will influence the regulatory compliance activities. Currently, there are 37 environmental regulatory compliance agreements in place at clean-up sites. Resolution of legal issues with Idaho, Tri-Party negotiations with Washington and the West Valley multi-agency agreement are among the successes he cited.

The Recovery Act, Marcinowski said, will accelerate cleanup and increase waste and materials disposition challenges. The Mercury Export Ban of 2008 is another new challenge for the office, he said, as now the office has been given responsibility for storage and long term management of mercury generated in the U.S.

Mark Gilbertson, DAS for Engineering and Technology, focused his remarks on the Energy Parks initiative, which involves development of large scale facilities at specific sites. The initiative is a partnership with the DOE, stakeholders, industry and regulators. The energy options include conventional and advanced technologies. Gilbertson cited the biomass facility at the SRS site, and solar facilities as Carlsbad, as examples.

“We are exploring partnerships with communities and industries to established Energy Parks and future use opportunities,” he said. The office is talking with industries about their potential interest in energy park sites and the employee opportunities that will also be a benefit to industries,

Planning and scheduling procurement, contract execution, planning and execution and Best in Class are top priorities identified by **Jack Surash**, DAS, for Acquisition and Project Management. These priorities will include increasing procurement authority to the sites, outreach and participation by industry, and a comprehensive acquisition planning. Good performance measurement plans, milestone evaluation and more frequent review for challenging projects are among project planning and execution strategies.

Dae Chung, DAS for Safety Management and Operations, noted there has been continuous improvement in safety. Procedures are good and the focus is now on safety oversight and building a safety culture that emphasizes leadership and worker involvement. With the additional activities resulting from the Recovery Act, “we need to prepare and be ready from a safety and operations perspective for the new workforce,” he said. The office expects between 13,000 and 14,000 new workers will be added to the EM workforce.

Desi Crouther, acting director of Human Capital Planning, cites the challenge of retaining and recruitment in light of an aging workforce. In developing a strong and talented pool of workers, he cited the three “pillars” of their work: talent acquisition, leadership succession, and performance competence.

Rounding round the panel was Jim Fiore, Director of the Office of Management Analysis. His office is completing implementation of the recommendations of the National Association of Public Administrators (NAPA) review. Of the 69 recommendations, 67 have been completed.

In responding to Recovery Act challenges, Fiore noted his office is identifying business practices necessary to implement “shovel ready, boots on the ground” projects.