

WM2013 Conference Panel Report

PANEL SESSION 69: US DOE Featured Site: West Valley, NY

Co-Chairs: **Larry Camper**, *US NRC*
John Greeves, *Talisman International*

Panel Reporter: **Christopher McKenney**, *US NRC*

Panelists:

1. **Chad Glenn**, *West Valley Senior Project Manager, US NRC*
2. **Craig Rieman**, *Deputy Director, US DOE/WVDP*
3. **Paul Giardina**, *Chief, Radiation and Indoor Air Branch, US EPA – Region 2*
4. **Paul Bembia**, *Program Director, West Valley Site Management, NYSERDA*

About 25 people attended this panel session which focused on the challenges and successes in decommissioning the West Valley site as well as the management of LLW, waste incidental to reprocessing and management of HLW. The session opened with four panelists presenting an overview of the history of the site, past challenges, successes, and future challenges. This was followed by a question and answer session which included questions on decommissioning goals, methods, and funding concerns for the rest of site remediation. Additionally, questions were asked about the source of various waste types and sources including the transuranic waste and the waste in the State-Disposal Area.

Summary of Presentations

Chad Glenn focused on the role of good communications for a complex site with many strong interests involved in its remediation being a key to the site overcoming the past challenges and turning them into the successes they are now. The Core Team process provided the vehicle to keep communications open even while facing differing views of how to solve the challenges. As part of his discussion, he also provided a background on West Valley and US NRC responsibilities at the site due to the West Valley Demonstration Project Act of 1981. He proposed a similar approach be considered during the Phase I decommissioning to ensure knowledge management and good working relations between all the agencies and public stakeholders.

Craig Rieman summarized the decommissioning successes and challenges that US DOE has faced remediating the site. He provided an overview of DOE responsibilities. One of the major successes over the past couple decades was the reduction of the overall site inventory through both source term removal in areas as well as vitrification of the liquid high-level waste. He provided an overview of the phased decommissioning activities including the placement of the permeable treatment wall to address existing groundwater contamination.

Paul Giardina provided background to the US EPA's role at the site and how its history goes back to the early 1970s. He addressed the improvement in communications that required an honest analysis of all the details required to be addressed to lead to the successes that have occurred and the approach to deal with the challenges in the future. He discussed that one of the biggest challenges facing the site in the future is the uncertainty of funding and that lower funding rates would leave the public and environment at risk for longer periods of time.

WM2013 Conference Panel Report

Paul Bembia represented the State's perspective on the remediation work being performed at the West Valley site. He provided a more in-depth history of the site and the State involvement back to the licensing days. Paul discussed additional success that had not been addressed at length by other speakers, which was the resolution of the lawsuit against US DOE's management of the site. This resolution lays out the responsibility for various parties in a more defined way than the original West Valley Demonstration Project Act of 1981. The resolution allows the various agencies to work more efficiently together to the goal of remediating the site. He also praised the phased decommissioning approach as it allows progress while also allowing time to gather more research to address the outstanding technical analyses required to deal with the major challenges in Phase II. Paul provided an overview of the history of the State-Disposal Area and the long-term performance improvements performed by the State.

Questions and Answers

In response to a question on the source of the transuranic waste at the site, **Craig Rieman** replied that the source was fuel from N Reactor at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

A question was asked about the purpose and source of waste for the State-Disposal Area. **Paul Bembia** summarized its history as one of the original six commercial low-level waste disposal sites in the United States. The State-Disposal Area is licensed by the State of New York.

Craig Rieman was asked about the decommissioning goal for Phase I. He answered that the goal is risk reduction as final goals will be established as part of Phase II for the entire site.

Several questions were posed to the panel on the impact of funding below the assumed rate in the Environmental Impact Statement and Decommission Plan and the issue that West Valley is a "small site" by US DOE's Environmental Management Office. **Craig Rieman** responded that US DOE Environmental Management Office's viewpoint is changing on West Valley and recognizes that it may be a small footprint but has big challenges. However, reduced funding could easily extend Phase I from a ten year project to a fifteen or twenty year project line. He also discussed that remediation and dismantlement of the main plant building is critical to the timelines, including locating alternate disposal or storage locations for the waste currently stored in it, due the costs related to maintaining safety within the aging building, which are a sizeable fraction of the annual budget. **Paul Giardina** also mentioned the site may be a victim of its own success. The site has made so many successes in risk-reduction that the overall site priority has reduced related to other US DOE projects. **Paul Bembia** discussed the challenges in the site being a non-Defense site, which has added challenges in both funding and finding disposal options for waste.

Craig Rieman was asked about the challenges that DOE/WVDP has faced in estimating cost to develop contracts for work at West Valley. Craig Rieman responded that US DOE maintains contingency funds to address appropriate changes in scope and that the issue is not unique to West Valley. The DOE Environmental Management Office is attempting to address the issue across the DOE complex.

A question was raised about why the demolishing of the Main Plant Building went from a plan to tent the building to reduce emissions to the potential for open air or explosive demolition. **Paul**

WM2013 Conference Panel Report

Giardina discussed how through the use of sectioning of the building, it may no longer be necessary to tent the whole building for demolition. This approach has been used at a number of large demolition projects across US EPA Region 2. **Craig Rieman** noted that while the exact method of demolishing the Main Plant Building has not been decided on, explosive demolition was not an option.