

Assistant Secretary Jessie H. Roberson
Office of Environmental Management
U. S. Department of Energy
Energy Communities Alliance
March 4, 2004

Good Morning. I want to thank the Energy Communities Alliance for this opportunity to share some time with you and talk about the cleanup progress being made in your communities.

When I took this job two and half years ago, I knew there were at least two things we all absolutely agreed upon:

- 1) The need to get this EM job done to remove risk from your communities, and
- 2) Protect the workforce that's doing this job.

Over the last two years, we, together, have taken decisive steps to transform a program that was focused on managing risk to a program that is focused on a core mission of accelerating risk reduction and cleanup. We are delivering fundamental change and achieving significant improvements in health, safety, and environmental protection. And with these actions, we are making a historic contribution to reducing the financial liability associated with the legacy of the Cold War.

I would like to take a moment and underscore the impacts of all of our effort.

- We have improved Safety Performance We are committed to instilling this philosophy in every worker's day-to-day decisions from start to finish of every project. We are demonstrating that we can accelerate work and improve safety performance at the same time. We have not, nor will we stop, paying attention to safety. We will continue to "raise the bar" and hold ourselves accountable to the highest standards. Complacency is not acceptable in our advance to the safe conclusion of our clean up objectives.
- We have demonstrated Cleanup Results and Risk Reduction Last year, we set a new floor of performance not seen before in the history of the program. I say floor because we see this as a level of performance that we will continue to build on. Over the last two years, for example:
 - Six of nine nuclear fuel basins completely deinventoried -- none in the plan before this;
 - 4100 of 5900 containers of plutonium -- 80 percent -- have been packaged -- we are almost complete;
 - Over 1300 of 2400 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel repackaged -- more than half -- the workforce has accelerated this work into this time period.

I can go on and on with examples of accelerated risk reduction and cleanup. We have accomplished consequential outcomes important to the public, our communities, and for the generations that follow us.

Three years ago, the EM program was described as lacking a risk-based cleanup approach and the hazards at the DOE sites and the liability associated with them did not appear to dictate the need for urgency. Innovative actions in all elements of the EM program were needed to transform DOE's processes and operations to reflect an accelerated risk-based cleanup paradigm. We are more than ever encouraging innovation in safety performance, accelerated risk reduction, and business management. We believe that through providing an atmosphere that encourages innovation, we can reduce risk to workers and the environment faster, and save resources to be reinvested in furthering the cleanup priorities of each of the sites. Tying all these accomplishments together has been our continued drive to improve performance in our acquisition strategy.

The Environmental Management transformation was driven from the necessity to address a ballooning cost to the taxpayers and a schedule that would leave a bitter legacy for the many generations that follow us to remedy. We would continue to create new generations of hazardous Cold War workers -- new Cold War workers lacking the experience that our current workforce has. Let us remember the environmental hazards we are dealing with are here, we aren't creating them. There is no magic to erase them. We had to re-evaluate previous accepted strategies and cleanup methods and recommit to safely and expeditiously cleaning up the Cold War legacy. We had avoided many tough decisions instead of confronting them. We did not hold ourselves accountable for delivering on risk reduction. In short, our indicators have measured process, not progress; opinions, not results.

Ironically, while historically there was tremendous insistence that the Department of Energy be in compliance with regulations, the pressure to actually reduce or eliminate risk was not comparable. But that is the job before us and the job we are doing. Let me be clear, even though difficult decisions lie before us. We are not seeking changes that would compromise protection of public health and safety and the environment, and we will not tolerate any contractor performance that fails to meet our safety requirements.

For that very reason, defining a risk-based end state is the only responsible way to assure long-term protection of the public and the environment. Without taking this approach, we cannot achieve a safe, credible and sustainable protective cleanup. This will ensure that our workforce is accomplishing results essential to achieving our cleanup and closure objectives. We can demonstrate that the workforce is doing the right work, the necessary work.

Most of the compliance issues DOE faces today could have been prevented. Only in the past few years have we begun to understand the necessary preventive measures and to develop a process for their implementation.

By focusing on developing a logical cleanup plan for the site as a whole that incorporates risk-based end states, rather than specific areas of concern, we can all avoid potentially unnecessary worker risk and resource expenditures. We can credibly insure we are doing the right work. For example, if the agreed-upon end state is industrial cleanup of a portion of the site to residential standards does not change the end state and may, in fact, increase the risk to workers for no added benefit. The path forward is simple in concept, but difficult to implement.

The establishment of a risk-based end state for each environmental cleanup site will be a necessity.

In sum, cleanup must emphasize risk reduction. We have an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the positive environmental effects of its efforts while protecting public health and improving environmental quality in your states that have hosted our facilities.

Cleanup of the Cold War legacy is a difficult, challenging job. We know there will be many impediments. That's probably the third thing we agree on. The only full and true measure of success will be the positive, measurable accomplishments of public safety and environmental protection. We are safer today than we were last year and we must stay the course so we are safer next year than we are today. ECA has been a positive proponent as well as a constructive critic of this program. All of us are better off for your interest, your commitment, and your hard work. I look forward to continuing this relationship.