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Secretary of Energy Abraham Previews New Accelerated Cleanup Plan for Former Cold War Nuclear Weapon Production Sites

Department's Budget Creates New \$800 Million 'Expedited Cleanup Account'

FERNALD, OHIO - In a visit to the Department of Energy's Fernald, Ohio cleanup project, U.S. Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham today previewed the Department's new accelerated cleanup plan for the sites of former nuclear weapon plants that were crucial to winning the Cold War. The Environmental Management plan creates a new \$800 million "Expedited Cleanup Account" to be used by participating sites and is part of the overall program's \$6.7 billion request for basic cleanup at all sites that will be released with the entire DOE FY03 Budget request next Monday.

"When I took office, I was presented with the old plan for cleaning up the Department's Cold War nuclear sites, which called for a timetable of some 70 years to complete and at a cost of \$300 billion," Abraham said. "That is not good enough for me, and I doubt it is good enough for anyone who lives near these sites."

"So last year I called for a top-to-bottom review of the program, which has been recently completed. The result is this new plan that is targeted to swiftly clean up serious problems at sites and also reduce the risks to human health, safety and the environment," Abraham said.

The new proposal emphasizes three basic goals: eliminate significant health and safety risks as soon as possible, review remaining risks on a case-by-case basis working with state and local officials and develop strategies for remediation, and streamline cleanup so current funding will go instead to accomplishing real cleanup progress, rather than routine maintenance and other non-cleanup projects.

"This initial \$800 million Expedited Cleanup Account represents our current estimate of the number of sites likely to need new cleanup agreements this year. However, we are ready to expand this account with more money as additional sites move to expedited schedules," Abraham said.

Under the proposal, to have access to the Expedited Cleanup Account, a site and DOE will have to reach an agreement on an expedited schedule that shows measurable gains in addressing cleanup and important risks. A site that agrees to participate in the new expedited cleanup plan will receive more resources in the near term than in previous years. After the level of funding ramps up at one of these sites and problems are addressed, the level of funding will ramp back down. Once an agreement is reached there will be a roadmap for activity and budgets through Fiscal Year 2008, leading to predictable funding levels which the Department and the White House will consent to submit to

Congress for the entire period of these agreements.

"By cleaning up serious problems more quickly under the new plan, our communities will be cleaner and safer," Abraham said. "The Environmental Management Program will be stronger and more effective in its mission of reducing health risks and expediting the environmental restoration of the nation's nuclear sites. And there is an extra benefit to the taxpayers, because over the long run, the new plan will yield substantial savings on overhead, maintenance and security costs which the program estimates to account for two-thirds of the overall EM budget."

"Working with the states and the regulatory agencies, DOE is proposing a new way of doing business, leading to greater accountability, responsibility, and opportunities for both the Department and the States," Abraham said.

"Promoting compliance and ensuring that key milestones are met must be our focus. In some instances, we will set aside funds in escrow, not to be released until those milestones are met. And if they are not, then that money will be put toward cleanup and making things right."

"Some will say the new approach won't work. But those who want to continue with business as usual will be consigning their sites and communities to a slower cleanup of the most serious health and safety risks," Abraham said. "Years ago, skeptics predicted that the cleanup of the Department's Rocky Flats site would take 65 years and cost more than \$36 billion. Through innovative reforms, like those embraced in our plan, the Rocky Flats site will be cleaned up and closed 55 years ahead of schedule in 2006 for about \$7 billion - saving taxpayers nearly \$29 billion."

Details of the Environmental Management's accelerated cleanup plan will be released following the presentation of the Department's Fiscal Year 2003 Budget on Monday, February 4.

Secretary Abraham's remarks from today's event will be available at the Department of Energy web site, www.energy.gov.

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