

Compliance and Implementation, and other potential government users, like the Department of Homeland Security. "There are proliferant activities that we're concerned about—it could be nuclear, it could be chemical, it might even be bio, although that's a lot harder to get

a handle on—and it might be in the interest of a number of agencies ... to have a site at which they could test and calibrate and evaluate their detectors," the House staffer said.

—Todd Jacobson

At the Weapons Labs/DOE Sites

AT LOS ALAMOS HOUSE SLASHES FUNDING ON AGING RAD WASTE PLANT

Los Alamos National Laboratory is grappling with yet another leak at its radioactive liquid waste treatment facility as the House again cut funding for its replacement. The House Appropriations Committee last week approved its version of the Fiscal Year 2010 Energy and Water Appropriations Act, yet again zeroing out an \$11 million request to fund the long-delayed RLWTF replacement, citing concerns over escalating costs. The vote came less than a month after a 500-gallon leak from corroded plastic fittings was revealed in one of the 46-year-old plant's piping systems.

National Nuclear Security Administration's latest budget submission to Congress, the agency acknowledged that the number was rising as more detailed design work is done, and the final price tag was left as simply, "to be determined." House appropriators bristled at that. "The committee is concerned with the significant cost overruns that the design has already experienced," the report accompanying the Energy and Water bill said. The project is labeled an "upgrade" in the budget request, but is for all practical purposes an entirely new plant. Senate appropriators, meanwhile, approved \$11 million for the RLWTF.

The leak, which was contained to a sump within the building where it happened, is the second in less than a year caused by the same problem, but only one of many in a long string of problems at the plant, which the lab and its federal managers have been trying to upgrade or replace for more than a decade. "The more than 40-year-old treatment facility does not comply with current codes and standards. These include International Building Code, seismic design and construction codes, and the National Electric Code," lab spokesman Kevin Roark said. "Continuous workarounds are required to keep systems running and excessive corrosion threatens system availability."

Much of the difficulty in nailing down a final cost estimate is associated with nuclear safety design issues being raised by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board. In February, the board sent a letter to NNSA raising questions about the safety design parameters of waste holding tanks to be used in the facility (*NW&M Monitor*, Vol. 13, No. 6). House appropriators signaled their intention to delay funding until the DNFSB's questions are resolved. The plant's troubles have been a longstanding concern at Los Alamos, because so much of the lab's nuclear work depends on the plant's waste-processing ability. The DNFSB has repeatedly argued that waste processing problems in particular threaten the lab's plutonium work, including pit manufacturing (*NW&M Monitor*, Vol. 10, No. 39). The most recent leak did not have any effect on the plant's ongoing processing operations, Roark said.

Pricetag 'To Be Determined'

The latest incarnation of the project was estimated in 2006 to have a price tag of as much as \$100 million, but in the

AT KANSAS CITY PLANT BEING CONSIDERED FOR MERCURY STORAGE

What is soon to be the Kansas City Plant's former home is among seven possible sites for long-term storage of the nation's elemental mercury, according to a notice of intent to prepare a Department of Energy Environmental Impact Statement. Also under consideration are three other Department of Energy sites—Hanford, the Savannah River Site and the Idaho National Laboratory—as well as the Grand Junction Disposal Site in Colorado, Hawthorne Army Depot in Nevada, and Waste Control Specialists in Texas. The DOE Office of Environmental Management is considering storage sites in response to the Mercury Export Ban Act of 2008, which prohibits the export of mercury

beginning in 2013 and requires DOE to have facilities ready then to manage and store mercury generated in the United States. Congress found that the free trade of elemental mercury on the world market, at relatively low prices and in ready supply, encourages the continued use of mercury outside of the United States. Banning its export could decrease the availability of it and encourage developing companies to switch to affordable mercury alternatives, it said.

The mercury would potentially be stored at the Bannister Federal Complex in Kansas City, which will soon be