“Clearly we get paid by members and we want to make sure we’re listening to their concerns and we want to make sure those that have some issues with us right now have a chance to talk to us and we’ll reach out or have reached out to those organizations,” he said. “We’ll see what happens next.”

—Todd Jacobson

**W76 LIFE EXTENSION PROGRAM SLIGHTLY EXCEEDING FY2011 EXPECTATIONS**

The W76 life extension program has endured its share of problems and setbacks, including extended difficulties in reestablishing production of a secret material several years ago, but the National Nuclear Security Administration said this week that production activities are slightly ahead of schedule in Fiscal Year 2011. NNSA spokesman Josh McConaha said the agency has made 100 percent of its “requested deliveries” of the submarine-launched warhead to the Navy, with contractors at several NNSA sites contributing to complete 48 percent of this year’s scheduled work on the W76. NNSA officials had expected to complete 46 percent of its scheduled work at this point of the year, McConaha said. “What I can say is we’re meeting all our commitments to the customers,” he said.

Y-12, which specializes in producing secondaries and related tasks, including the production of classified Fogbank that caused a delay of a year in the completion of a First Production Unit on the warhead, also is apparently on target with its work. “They’re consistently achieving the product acceptance we need and continuing to be ahead of the next assembly/delivery requirements,” McConaha said. Based on the New START Treaty and the Nuclear Posture Review, production activities on the W76 are currently scheduled through 2018, he said. The exact number of W76 warheads that are planned for refurbishment is classified, as are the NNSA’s annual targets. In addition to the problems in creating Fogbank, the delivery of the first batch of refurbished W76 warheads to the Navy in 2009 was also delayed for several months due to problems with the warhead’s arming, fuzing and firing system.

—From staff reports

**NEVADA PROTECTIVE FORCE CONTRACT SET FOR FULL AND OPEN COMPETITION**

The National Nuclear Security Administration issued a notice last week that, as expected, opens up the Nevada National Security Site protective force contract to all businesses. The NNSA had hoped to set aside the contract for small businesses when it released solicitation documents last year, but after conducting market research, the agency decided against the approach last fall, as **NW&M Monitor** reported in November. The decision is good news for incumbent WSI, which has held the site security contract since 1965 and would’ve been forced to team with a small business to retain its role at the site if the contract was set aside for small business. According to the solicitation, a Request for Proposals is expected in “early” May 2011 and proposals are likely to be due in mid-to-late June. The contract is expected to last five years (three years base with two one-year option periods) and has an estimated value of more than $300 million. It includes protective force services at NNSS as well as at the Remote Sensing Laboratory at Nellis Air Force Base and the NNSA’s North Las Vegas Complex. A pre-proposal meeting is likely to be held at the site May 24.

In June 2010, the NNSA issued a solicitation seeking small businesses, small business-led teams and joint ventures that qualify as small businesses that might have interest in the contract. WSI, which until last year was formally known as Wackenhut Services, has a large share of the protective force contracts in the NNSA, performing security work at the Savannah River Site and the Y-12 National Security Complex (through a broad Department of Energy Oak Ridge protective force contract), though it recently lost out on its bid to wrest Los Alamos National Laboratory’s protective forces from incumbent SOC Los Alamos. The Department of Energy has explored opening up protective force contracts to small businesses before, most notably at the Savannah River Site. Ultimately, those plans were shelved due to poor response from small businesses, but a requirement was added to the RFP requiring large businesses to submit a small business subcontracting plan as part of proposals and Wackenhut included Dade Moeller and Associates, Albuquerque-based small business Westech International and New Orleans-based small business Critique Resource Consulting Corporation on its team.

—Todd Jacobson

**DNFBS SEEKING ANSWERS ABOUT PROGRAM USED FOR SEISMIC ANALYSIS**

Seismic concerns for nuclear facilities have taken on an increased level of urgency in the wake of the Japanese nuclear catastrophe, and a recent Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board letter to the Department of Energy reveals that the computer program DOE officials are using to estimate seismic hazards on many high-profile construction projects can’t always be trusted. In an April 8 letter to
Deputy Energy Secretary Dan Poneman, Board Chairman Peter Winokur said that a specific computation method within the SASSI computer program (“A System for the Analysis of Soil-Structure Interaction”), known as the subtraction method, has been plagued by “significant technical and software quality assurance issues,” and the Board said it is concerned that the glitches could lead to “erroneous conclusions that affect safety-related structural and equipment design.” Some contractors have modified the program to correct for errors in the problematic “subtraction method,” but a technical basis for the modifications hasn’t been established, according to the Board, and a DOE team assembled last year is “poorly equipped” to find a solution to the problem, the Board said.

Program in Widespread Use

The program originated as a research tool at the University of California at Berkeley in 1981, and the subtraction method, or a modification of the method, has been used on many of the Department’s biggest projects, including the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement at Los Alamos, the Uranium Processing Facility at Y-12, the Pit Disassembly and Conversion Project at the Savannah River Site, and at Los Alamos’ Plutonium Facility, where the Board said that use of the program “produced unrealistic seismic responses.” The program was also used in the design of the Waste Treatment Plant at the Hanford Site, the Salt Waste Processing Facility at Savannah River, the Highly Enriched Uranium Materials Facility at Y-12, the Integrated Waste Treatment Unit at Idaho National Laboratory, the Device Assembly Facility at the Nevada National Security Site, and in the construction of bays and cells at the Pantex Plant. The Board did not say whether seismic hazards were overstated or understated by the program, but it said that the program’s widespread use makes it important that it “conservatively predict structural and equipment demands.”

The Board also criticized DOE’s efforts to examine the problem, saying a soil-structure interaction team assembled in the fall by DOE’s Chief of Nuclear Safety didn’t include any representatives from the National Nuclear Security Administration, lacks resources or a specific plan to address the problems. “Without formality, adequate resources, and a detailed plan for deliverables, the team is poorly positioned to identify and resolve the current problems with SASSI,” Board staff wrote in a report accompanying the letter to DOE.

Board Requests Quick Response from DOE

In its letter, the Board asked that DOE provide a report and brief the Board within 45 days on its concerns, which focused on five areas:

— The need for a root cause analysis of issues with the program;
— The need for a complex-wide assessment of software quality assurance for the program;
— The need to beef up its study team with additional outside experts;
— How guidance on SASSI issues can be communicated to under-design DOE projects; and
— The development of a detailed corrective action plan.

Seismic concerns have driven up costs at two of the biggest DOE construction projects, the CMRR-NF and the UPF. Recent studies have revealed an increased risk of major earthquakes at Los Alamos, which is built atop a volcanic plateau crisscrossed by active faults, and the SASSI program is designed to study the interaction between facilities and the soil around the building. A lab study found that the Los Alamos area has experienced two or three major earthquakes of magnitude greater than 6.5 in the past 10,000 years. At Y-12, the UPF and other new facilities and building modifications are being designed to withstand the maximum expected earthquake-generated ground acceleration in accordance with DOE safety guidelines, which appears to be in the range of a 5.0-6.0 on the Richter scale within 100 miles of Y-12.

—Todd Jacobson

MO-99 BILL PASSES ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE TO FULL SENATE

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee reported out a bill this week that would authorize $143 million over four years to support fledgling domestic efforts to produce the workhorse medical isotope Molybdenum-99, while curtailing isotope production that utilizes proliferation-sensitive highly enriched uranium. The “American Medical Isotopes Production Act of 2011” was reintroduced Jan. 25 by Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) and now goes to the full Senate for consideration.

An amendment added by Bingaman during the markup authorizes $5 million to be appropriated for establishing a federal waste disposition program, as the Department of Energy will be responsible for the byproducts of medical isotope production. The byproduct material—higher concentrated Class B and C waste—is more expensive to dispose of, and currently only the three states that make up the Atlantic Compact have access to a commercial domestic disposal pathway for B/C wastes. At a Feb. 1 Committee hearing, Roy Brown, the federal affairs senior director for the Council on Radionuclides and Radiopharmaceuticals, said, “It is critically important for the objectives of this legislation that DOE accepts such radioactive waste at