extensive testing on using the fuel in boiling water reactors would need to take place, which he said could take up to eight years. Before Duke Energy pulled out of the MOX program in 2008, tests using the MOX fuel were conducted in one of the company’s pressurized water reactors (problems forced the testing program to be truncated), and the NNSA, NRC and Shaw AREVA haven’t said whether new tests will be needed. “That would mean the MOX program would sit idle for the entire period of the test and it likely would never be used if the test failed,” Clements said. “This embarrassing and wasteful outcome must be prevented and the $4.9 billion plutonium white elephant must be stopped now.” The group would prefer the plutonium to be immobilized and treated as high-level waste.

—Todd Jacobson

At the Weapons Labs/DOE Sites

At Los Alamos .............. Lab Puts Price Tag on PF-4 Ventilation Upgrades

Los Alamos National Laboratory estimates upgrading the ventilation system in the lab’s Plutonium Facility—known as PF-4—could cost $40 million to $80 million and take seven years to complete. The estimate, contained in an April 1 National Nuclear Security Administration communication to the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, is the latest step in the response by the lab and NNSA to concerns raised by the safety board about PF-4’s ability to withstand a major earthquake.

The “pre-conceptual costs estimates” involve modifying glove box exhaust systems and related systems used to remove and filter air from the plutonium work areas, along with electrical system improvements, including uninterruptible power supplies and one new and one upgraded diesel generator. The idea is to create a system that would continue operating and filtering air in the case of a major earthquake. The upgrade proposal is part of the response by the lab and NNSA to the DNFSB’s Recommendation 2009-2, which called for major upgrades at PF-4 to deal with earthquake risk. The schedule, according to the memo to DNFSB, would require a year each for conceptual, preliminary and final design work, a three-year construction phase, and a final year for closeout.

Funding to be Sought as New Line Item Project

If the work goes forward, it would be funded as part of a new Technical Area 55 Revitalization Project—TRP-III. TRP-II is already underway, supporting a range of improvements at PF-4 with a $75.4 million to $99 million estimated price tag. “TRP-III will be developed as a separate, stand-alone line item construction project,” NNSA spokesman Damien LaVera said in a statement. “Initial out-year funding projections for TRP-III have been identified by NNSA in the DOE/NNSA five-year planning window within the DOE/NNSA Program Planning and Budget Execution System. It is important to note that planning for TRP-III at this point is very preliminary and initial cost estimate ranges are based only on feasibility analyses and pre-conceptual alternative evaluations. Considerable development is required prior to inclusion of TRP-III funding in future President’s budget requests.”

A number of other options were considered, according to the NNSA’s memo to DNFSB, but found wanting. A more complete upgrade to the entire ventilation system was priced out at $325 million back in 2005, while the “no action” alternative would have been unlikely to meet the goal of reducing off-site radiation dose in a major earthquake and fire scenario.

At Oak Ridge .............. Howanitz Leaving Y-12 for Bechtel Corporate Job

John Howanitz, B&W Y-12’s senior vice president of transformation and projects, is leaving Oak Ridge after five years to become the operations manager for Bechtel National’s Nuclear Security and Allied Government business line at the company’s corporate offices in Frederick, Md. The move is effective May 1. The move is one of the final pieces of the Bechtel management shakeup that also brought former Los Alamos official Doris Heim to Frederick to head up business development for Bechtel’s nuclear security and allied government business unit. Howanitz had been in charge of one of the biggest construction projects in the weapons complex, the multi-billion-dollar Uranium Processing Facility planned for the Y-12 National Security Complex. Bechtel declined to comment on Howanitz’s replacement until it has been announced internally. It appears, though, that the slot will be filled—at least in some capacity—by Mark Seely, who most recently served as manager for Bechtel Parsons Blue Grass, the contractor for construction and operation of the chemical weapons destruction plant at the Blue Grass Army Depot.