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State signs historic agreements with DOE and NASA to clean-up the Santa Susanna Field Lab site

SACRAMENTO, Calif., – An historic moment in the environmental cleanup at the Santa Susana Field Lab (SSFL) site was reached today with the signing of agreements between California’s Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) and both the federal Department of Energy (DOE) and the federal National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The agreement incorporates the provisions of the State’s stringent environmental standards and an accelerated approach to cleaning up low-level radiation and toxic chemical contamination.

“This historic agreement is great news for nearby residents in Ventura County and the people of California,” said Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. “I applaud all parties for their commitment to working on a solution that will clean up the environment and protect the health of residents in the bordering communities.”

“I am thrilled that DOE and NASA have agreed to clean up the property to the highest environmental standards so that local residents can once again trust in the safety of their surrounding environment,” said Linda Adams, Secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA) who has lead this effort. “I’m happy that after 3 years of intense negotiations with the responsible parties, we have been able to reach agreement that will provide the protective cleanup that the community has sought for over 50 years. This is an historic day and I thank all of our partners for bringing this to fruition.”

The agreement meets the high bar set by Senate Bill 990 which requires the entire SSFL property to be cleaned up to stringent and protective standards, and places the cleanup of both chemical and radioactive contamination under the oversight of DTSC. The agreements cover DOE’s 290 acres and NASA’s 451 acres of the SSFL site. The remainder of the property is owned by the Boeing Company.

U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, said “The landmark agreements announced today between NASA, the Department of Energy and the State of California are an important step toward real protection for families who live near the Santa Susana Field Laboratory. For many years I have strongly supported the state’s and communities’ efforts to ensure that a comprehensive cleanup is conducted at Santa Susana that protects the health of the public including children and pregnant women. I am pleased that NASA and the Department of Energy have stepped up to the plate and agreed to clean up the Santa Susana site to the levels California has determined will provide the greatest protection to nearby communities.”

“This is a milestone that fulfils commitments we made earlier this year to the community and brings to an end a years of negotiation,” said Maziar Movassaghi, DTSC’s Acting Director. “It allows us to focus on cleaning the property, and we are truly pleased to get on with the work of cleaning this site for the surrounding community.”

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SSFL is a former rocket engine test and nuclear research facility on more than 2,800 acres along the border of Los Angeles and Ventura counties. The Boeing Company, NASA and DOE operated facilities on portions of the property from 1949-2006, and are responsible for the cleanup overseen by DTSC. The state has been in negotiations with all three responsible parties for several years. DOE once operated several nuclear reactors, associated fuel facilities and laboratories on what is known as “Area IV” of the SSFL facility. NASA conducted liquid-fuel rocket engine testing on its portion of the facility (Area II and part of Area I).

The agreement integrates the United States Environmental Protection Agency’s (U.S. EPA) radiological survey work into the site investigation, using U.S. EPA’s expertise and resources to identify areas of radiological contamination needing cleanup. The timing of the agreement allows for the state to maximize resources by using U.S. EPA’s survey, accelerates the cleanup timeline and also avoids costly duplication of effort. Radiological wastes will be disposed at a permitted DOE facility, while hazardous wastes will be taken to a permitted hazardous waste disposal facility.

In December 2008, Boeing sued DTSC over the enforceability of the bill, and continues to clean up the property under an earlier agreement that is not to the stringent environmental standard called for in SB 990. Despite the lawsuit, the state continues to negotiate with Boeing

“We hope we can reach a similar agreement with Boeing, and that our continued negotiations bear fruit as they did with DOE and NASA,” said Adams.

Copies of the agreements and the response to comments can be found at www.dtsc.ca.gov.

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