

COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP

immediate

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Bush Administration Proposes (Again) to Slash Cleanup Budget for Rocketdyne Site

Just-Released Department of Energy Budget Cuts Cleanup by 20-30%

The federal energy department budget just released proposed slashing cleanup funds for its extensively contaminated Santa Susana nuclear facility. The cleanup budget, which was \$17,571,000 last year and \$17,179,000 this year, would be reduced to \$13,740,000 next year under the Administration's proposals. The expenditures for next year had previously been budgeted at \$19.6 million, so the cuts would be 20% off last year and 30% off what next year was supposed to be.

Last year, the Bush Administration proposed similar cuts, but Congressman Elton Gallegly and Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein succeeded in restoring the funding in Congress.

"It seems incomprehensible that the federal government, which created the contamination at this federal facility through decades of sloppy practices, would attempt to weasel out of its obligations to clean up the mess it made," said Daniel Hirsch, President of the Committee to Bridge the Gap, a nuclear watchdog group that monitors the cleanup. "One can only hope that once again Congressman Gallegly and Senators Boxer and Feinstein will succeed in blocking this in Congress."

The facility contained approximately ten nuclear reactors - one of which suffered a partial meltdown in 1959 - plus a plutonium fuel fabrication facility, hot lab for cutting up irradiated nuclear fuel, and numerous other nuclear operations. There is widespread chemical and radioactive contamination.

In addition to the deep cut in the cleanup budget, there are no funds provided for the EPA independent radiation survey for which DOE has repeatedly promised to pay.

Three weeks ago, DOE issued an Environmental Assessment announcing its intention to leave in place 98% of the soil it concedes is radioactively contaminated and release the site for unrestricted residential use. "In essence, DOE has broken longstanding promises to clean up the site and instead has announced it is walking away from its cleanup responsibilities," said Hirsch. "This budget confirms that decision. If not reversed, there will be children playing on top of the radioactive contamination in the not-too-distant future."

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