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Energy Technology Engineering Center
Area IV, Santa Susana Field Laboratory

CleanUpdate

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DOE Receives Full Funding for EPA Radiological Study

In a March 16, 2009, letter from Dr. Steven Chu, Secretary of Energy, the California Congressional Delegation was informed that \$38.3 million would be provided for completion of the Area IV radiological survey as part the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Since that time, DOE has been working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to revise the interagency agreement for performing the radiological survey of Area IV.

These funds, combined with \$1.7 million provided earlier from DOE, will allow a complete radiological characterization of Area IV and the northern undeveloped land. This study will include a new Historical Site Assessment, a gamma instrument survey of the entire accessible area, and soil and groundwater sampling throughout Area IV.

EPA will review the historical records and data regarding past operations at the Energy Technology Engineering Center (ETEC) and use the findings of its records review to design the Area IV survey. Through the gamma survey, EPA will use gamma radiation sensing instruments to identify potential "hot spots," or areas with elevated instrument readings, to be used to identify locations for additional soil sampling. The Area IV study will

involve taking thousands of surface and subsurface soil samples throughout Area IV. The EPA will also take samples from groundwater and seeps.

All EPA survey activities must be completed by September 2011, to meet stimulus funding guidelines.

For more information, EPA's *Scoping Document for Development of Radiation Survey of a Background Reference Area and Area IV/Buffer Zone* is on the Energy Technology Engineering Center website at http://etec.energy.gov/Health-and-Safety/Documents/EPARadSurvey/SSFL_Area_IV_Rad_SOW_December%202008.pdf.

Stakeholders will note that the Recovery Act funding for ETEC also includes an additional \$15.7 million. This funding has been set aside at DOE headquarters to be used for potential acceleration of cleanup activities at ETEC pending further discussion with EPA, DTSC, and our stakeholders.

Have email? Get connected!

DOE encourages those who would like to receive the **CleanUpdate** and other SSFL news by email to send your address to: ETEC-Energy@emcbc.doe.gov

Greetings to the Santa Susana community:

Much has happened since our December 2008 Newsletter. We would like to update you on those activities and our plans for the near future.

The most important development is the beginning of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) comprehensive radionuclide survey of Area IV. In December and January, DOE transferred a total of \$1.7 million to EPA to begin this work. Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, full funding of the survey will be made available to EPA. See the story on page 1.

July 2009 will mark 50 years since the Sodium Reactor Experiment (SRE) meltdown, and we are planning a meeting in the near future about the accident. We know the SRE meltdown continues to be an issue of interest and concern among our stakeholders, and we want to begin to address, to the extent possible, issues of most interest to Santa Susana stakeholders. We will notify stakeholders when we have details about time and place.

We are introducing, with this issue of the *SSFL CleanUpdate*, the proposed approach for an Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) for SSFL Area IV. The ERA will be prepared to evaluate the potential effects of radiological and chemical contamination on local wildlife and plants. It will require an inventory of the wildlife and vegetation that are found in Area IV; documentation of the contaminants, their volume, and potency; identification and evaluation of the mechanisms by which the vegetation and wildlife might be exposed to site contamination; and an assessment of the potential impacts and risks the contaminants pose for those species.

Although some environmental data needed for the ERA will depend on completion of the EPA radiological survey and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) directed chemical characterization studies, we want to begin discussions of the risk assessment now, because we want to make sure we have an approach that will be acceptable to the public when we are ready to move forward.

The Ecological Risk Assessment and a planned Human Health Risk Assessment will play a critical role in decisions DOE will make in the future, and we want stakeholders to have ample opportunity to ask questions and understand how it will be performed. We also want to understand and include stakeholder concerns in our planning. We are calling this initiative the Risk Assessment Dialogue.

We are working closely with DTSC technical staff to develop the broad outlines of our ERA approach. This work includes regular collaboration, interim discussions, and joint field trips to the SSFL and vicinity. Our collaborative efforts with DTSC will culminate in a document, the *Proposed Approach to the Ecological Risk Assessment for SSFL Area IV*, specifically designed to describe DOE's proposed approach to conducting the ERA and to solicit community input on that approach.

We will hold a workshop to explain the ERA approach and begin a dialogue with community members that will help DOE gain a deeper understanding of community preferences about how we will go about assessing the impacts of site contamination on the natural environment. After the workshop, we will distribute the *Proposed Approach* for review and comment during a 30-day public comment period. We invite both your participation in the workshop and your comments on the approach. We want to consider stakeholder perspectives to help refine our approach **before** we prepare the ERA work plan and field sampling plan.

What else is going on? Check out our *News Briefs* on page 4.

We expect these activities will help us continue to make progress toward cleanup at SSFL. And as we progress toward final cleanup, we look forward to your continued participation.



Stephie Jennings, DOE NEPA Document Manager



Thomas Johnson, DOE Federal Project Director



An ecological survey will identify and inventory animals and plants at SSFL Area IV, including those that are abundant, like the western fence lizard (*Sceloporus occidentalis*) above, and species that are more rare, like the Braunton's milk vetch (*Astragalus brauntonii*) below, which must be protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.



Community Involvement Plan Nears Completion

DOE is putting the finishing touches on the *Draft Community Involvement Plan for the Area IV Santa Susana Field Laboratory Environmental Impact Statement*. The plan describes community involvement activities that will support the process of preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) leading to cleanup and closure of Area IV.

The *Draft Plan* outlines proposed activities for public involvement for 2009-2010. It will be posted on the ETEC website (<http://www.etc.energy.gov/>) in the near future for a 30-day public comment period. DOE will solicit comments from the public, and Federal, state, and local agencies for incorporation into the final plan.

According to the DOE EIS document manager, Stephie Jennings, DOE sees this comment opportunity as another way stakeholders can be involved in shaping how DOE will make decisions related to cleanup for Area IV. The *Plan* lays out several community involvement activities that DOE plans to accomplish over the next two years. DOE intends to revise the *Plan* bi-annually as it moves through the decision making process. Near-term activities include:

- **Community Dialogue on the Ecological Risk Assessment.** The public will be invited to participate in a workshop on the overall approach, provide input to the sampling design, and later review the subsequent sampling plan for collection of biological data for the ecological risk assessment.
- **Historical Interviews Project.** Through its Historical Interviews Project, DOE plans to reach out to former employees with knowledge of SSFL past activities. DOE intends to engage people through individual interviews and during small group meetings. DOE's objective is to develop a



A prickly phlox (*Lepodactylon californicus*) was in full bloom in Area IV on March 12 near the location of the former Sodium Reactor Experiment facility.

more complete understanding of SSFL Area IV work processes and activities so that characterization of Area IV can be adequately accomplished. This information will be provided to EPA as it plans and completes its survey.

- **Community Outreach.** DOE staff will expand its efforts to participate in other community group events. Through its **Community Liaison Program**, DOE plans to solicit input and gather information from a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including former employees as discussed above, to ensure a depth and breadth of input is considered.
- **On-going Communications.** DOE will continue to use its website, information repositories, topic-specific fact sheets, and newsletter, the *CleanUpdate*, to keep the community informed about progress toward cleanup and closure of SSFL Area IV. DOE also plans to communicate to the community using periodic e-mails and invites interested parties with e-mail addresses to provide them to DOE. Please provide your e-mail address along with your name to ETEC-Energy@emcbc.doe.gov.

DOE's primary objective for these outreach efforts is to ensure it understands, considers, and balances varying points of view in the studies, cleanup, and closure of Area IV with the project's legal, regulatory, technical, and scientific requirements.

The development of the *Draft Plan* was guided by the results of the *Report on Community Interviews: Community Concerns and Preferences for Public Participation in the Cleanup of Area IV Santa Susana Field Laboratory*. The report, which was completed earlier this year by P2 Solutions, a firm specializing in public participation services, summarized community concerns about DOE's plans to clean up Area IV and made recommendations for public participation opportunities in connection with the EIS.

A summary of the *Report* is included as an appendix to the *Draft Plan*. The full community interview report can be found on the ETEC website, at http://www.etc.energy.gov/EIS/Documents/EIS_Community_Interviews.pdf.

Ecological, Cultural Surveys To Help Protect SSFL Resources

DOE has offered and EPA has accepted DOE's support in conducting ecological and cultural surveys of SSFL Area IV before EPA begins its radiological characterization study. The purpose of these surveys is to inventory and identify potentially sensitive species, habitats, and cultural sites in the areas to be surveyed by EPA. This information will help EPA, DTSC, and DOE to proceed carefully with radiologic and chemical sampling and to avoid potential impacts to the existing environment, including fragile species and historical artifacts that must be protected.

EPA Proceeds with Background Radiological Study

EPA is proceeding with a background radionuclide study, working with the community, DTSC, and DOE to identify acceptable locations to collect soil background data. EPA has said it will begin collecting background samples this summer.

DTSC Leads Background Chemical Study

DTSC is leading the study for collection of additional background data for metals, dioxins, and other chemicals. DOE is working with DTSC as they develop their background study.

What Is a Background Study?

Background studies are focused on areas that were not impacted by SSFL operations. These two background studies will help scientists establish concentrations of radionuclides and chemicals that existed before operations occurred at SSFL. Scientists will compare the background conditions with current conditions within Area IV, as documented by the upcoming comprehensive EPA and DTSC-directed studies. This comparison will help them identify radionuclides and chemicals in Area IV that resulted from activities at ETEC. These radionuclides and chemicals will be the focus of future cleanup efforts.

For more information

<http://www.etc.energy.gov/EIS/EIS.html>
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