

COMMENTS OF

THE OAK RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL PEACE ALLIANCE
ON THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY'S
DRAFT SITE-WIDE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
FOR THE OAK RIDGE Y-12 PLANT

FEBRUARY 2001

SUMMARY

The Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance concludes its review of the Draft Site-Wide Environmental Impact Statement for Oak Ridge Y-12 Plant and calls on the Department of Energy to withdraw the Draft EIS in order to correct egregious faults and shortcomings.

The Y-12 Site-Wide EIS is the first ever Environmental Impact Statement for the Y-12 Plant. It represents DOE's commitment in 1995 to conduct a thorough and comprehensive evaluation of the environmental, safety and health impacts of operations at Y-12. The Y-12 Site-Wide EIS is far from comprehensive.

The major concerns of OREPA are highlighted here:

- Environmental Justice. DOE asserts that there is no community of color or low-income community disproportionately impacted by Y-12 operations. This is untrue and smacks of environmental racism. The Scarboro community, located half a mile from Y-12, has been the victim of contamination from past activities and continues to bear the first and heaviest load of all off-site releases from Y-12 activities.

- Failure to study the entire site. The Y-12 Site-Wide EIS is neither comprehensive nor thorough. It fails to address site-wide environmental issues adequately and does not explore the environmental, safety and health issues arising from the continued operation of current facilities— despite DOE's admission that the building are unsafe and are being "operated in a run-to-failure mode."

- Segmentation. DOE is forbidden by law from breaking a large plan up into little pieces in an effort to minimize the cumulative environmental impact. The Y-12 SW-EIS proposes to examine only two pieces of a larger planned modernization effort and ignores environmental impacts that will directly result from the replacement of old facilities. The EIS should be withdrawn until DOE is prepared to fully analyze its entire Site Integrated Modernization proposal, considering similar, connected and cumulative impacts of all activities at Y-12.

- Contamination. DOE's proposed action will lead to unacceptable levels of contamination to the residents of Scarboro as well as the larger community around the site. Under DOE's plan, four carcinogens will be released at levels that exceed threshold values: arsenic, beryllium, nickel and cadmium. Cleanup of other dangerous materials (such as chlorinated solvents and carcinogens in groundwater) are not addressed.

- DOE's statement of "need" for the proposed modernization of Y-12 has been overtaken by time and events. Political leaders now envision a much smaller nuclear arsenal for the US than the one presented in the EIS as justification for the massive modernization of Y-12.

- DOE's proposal to build a new weapons production facility, the Special Materials Complex, violates US and international law.

- DOE's proposed new nuclear weapons complex increases the nuclear danger for US citizens and the world and undermines US nonproliferation policy.

Comment No. 1

Issue Code: 13

DOE is committed to compliance with Executive Order 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*. The environmental justice analysis was prepared in accordance with CEQ's guidelines of environmental justice under NEPA. The Y-12 SWEIS addresses the issue of whether implementation of the proposed action and alternatives would result in disproportionately high and adverse environmental effects on minority or low-income populations. CEQ's guidance further states that an environmental effect must be significant to qualify as disproportionately high and adverse, where significant is defined by the CEQ's implementation recommendations (see 40 CFR Part 1508.27). As discussed in Volume I, Chapter 5, Sections 5.12 and 5.13 of the Y-12 SWEIS, implementation of the alternatives for the continuation of the Y-12's weapons support mission, and the construction and operation of new facilities for the HEU Storage and Special Materials missions at Y-12 would pose no significant radiological or nonradiological health risks to the public which includes the Scarboro Community. Proposed new facilities would benefit workers' health and safety, and would lower the risk to the public by incorporating engineered design measures and new standards for minimizing effects of natural phenomenon events (e.g., earthquakes). The conservatively estimated dose to the MEI for Alternative 4 would be approximately 4.5 mrem/year, which is below the NESHAP standard of 10 mrem/year. The risks would not be significant regardless of the racial, ethnic, and economic composition of potentially affected populations.

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Comment No. 2

Issue Code: 25

The Y-12 SWEIS has been prepared in accordance with CEQ's regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) and DOE's NEPA regulations (10 CFR Part 1021) and procedures. DOE has analyzed the potential environmental impacts identified for the proposed action and alternatives in the Y-12 SWEIS. DOE believes that it has adequately addressed impacts to the environment that could result from implementing the proposed action and alternatives for the entire Y-12 site as identified in the Y-12 SWEIS physical area of analysis in

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