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As a result of the steps taken, DOE has seen improvements in the area of quality assurance, Polk said. “It is not something that we believe we have now fixed and can remove those resources. It is our intent to keep those resources applied to those key vendors and critical procurements throughout those procurement activities until we receive those materials are sure they are what we ordered and ready to go into construction.”

### **DOE Continues to Use Firm Behind Faulty Welds**

According to Polk, DOE is continue to use the subcontractor that was responsible for the faulty welds, Amer Industrial Technologies (AIT), on the SWPF project. In its October 2009 report, the CPR team noted that AIT had restricted access to inspectors sent by Parsons as part of efforts to improve quality assurance. “Because of the complexity of upcoming work specific to the fabrication of tank cooling jackets, the project should consider alternative sources for this fabrication, given recent AIT welding issues and AIT’s resistance to inspector access to its facility. If the project chooses to keep this work at AIT, additional inspectors should be placed at AIT in an effort to provide adequate oversight by keeping inspectors on the shop floor at all times while this critical work is being performed.”

Polk said, though, that the issue of AIT resisting inspectors has been resolved. “Very shortly after that report, all of those issues were resolved with Amer and unfettered and complete access was given to the Department of Energy and Parsons,” he said. “Whenever you’re dealing with vendors, there always comes into play the contractual arrangements that you have with them. And part of the concern, and what Amer was dealing with at the time, they felt was contractually related. We got through the issues. They allowed access. They began to recognize, themselves, what the expertise that we were putting in their shops was doing to improve their performance for us and to prepare them to be able to compete for a lot of what looked like future work on the commercial side and DOE and DOD.”

### **Staffing Concerns**

Another potential risk to the SWPF project, reiterated throughout the CPR team’s report, is the lack of adequate staffing, particularly on the DOE side, as construction work increases. “DOE staff turnover is a concern for the SWPF project,” the report says. “Although the staffing level is functionally adequate at this time, a lack of in-depth experience could seriously impact future efforts when coupled with the turnover of experienced engineering personnel. This is especially true in the area of the electrical and instrumentation and control disciplines,

where turnover has been a problem for the past several years.” Contributing to the staffing concerns is the loss of EM personnel at Savannah River to the National Nuclear Security Administration because of the higher salaries NNSA can provide, the report adds.

DOE is working to address staffing concerns on the SWPF project, Polk said. “We’ve lost some key resources and the way we have tried to deal with that, quite frankly, is whatever incentives and/or other appropriate ... avenues within the federal guidelines to retain folks and go out and effectively compete and bring in new folks from the outside and from other places within the federal government,” he said. “While it’s been tough on the federal side, because [for] some of those resources, quite frankly, there just aren’t as many of them out there in special areas like instrumentation and controls as there used to be, the project has had to go out and contract resources on a sort of a ‘pay-by-the-drink’ basis so that we can fill those gaps until perhaps I can fill them with federal resources.”

—Mike Nartker

### **GAO PRESSES DOE TO ADDRESS PROTECTIVE FORCE PERSONNEL ISSUES**

Reflecting the growing unhappiness of the Department of Energy’s protective forces, the Government Accountability Office late last month urged the Department of Energy to accelerate progress to address career and longevity issues faced by the Department’s security contractors or reconsider federalizing the workers that protect the nation’s nuclear weapons sites. In its Jan. 29 report, *DOE Needs to Address Protective Forces’ Personnel System Issues*, the GAO did not take a side in the debate about federalizing the guard force—an idea the Department officially abandoned last year—but it pressed DOE to enhance the longevity and retirement options faced by the Department’s protective force personnel.

The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks brought about significant changes to the Department’s protective forces as they morphed from an industrial security posture to more of a tactical response force to protect the DOE sites that house Category I/II nuclear materials, like Los Alamos National Laboratory, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, the Savannah River Site, the Pantex Plant, Idaho National Laboratory, the Nevada Test Site and the Y-12 National Security Complex. The change, however, brought with it an increase in the demands on officers, as well as an uptick in injury rates and attrition, driving up recruiting, hiring and training costs. Retirement benefits haven’t changed, however, creating a disconnect that has drawn the attention of Congress for years, with lawmakers calling the disconnect “problematic” in the Fiscal Year 2010 Defense

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Authorization Act. “Protective force contractors, unions, and DOE security officials are concerned that the implementation of [tactical response force’s] more rigorous requirements and the current protective forces’ personnel systems threaten the ability of protective forces—especially older members—to continue their careers until retirement age,” the GAO report said.

### **GAO Unhappy With ‘Limited’ Action**

Specifically, the GAO criticized the Department for taking “limited” action on a series of recommendations to improve career longevity and protective force performance that were delivered last year by a study group chartered by DOE’s Office of Health, Safety and Security. The group advocated a host of changes to Department policy that would more clearly define the necessary requirements for certain protective force jobs and make it easier for protective force officers to transition to less physically demanding jobs, both within protective force organizations or in the Department as a whole, potentially expanding the career paths for workers. The GAO said that revamping the management of the protective forces personnel or federalizing the force could result in effective security “if well-managed.”

Thus far, however, DOE has taken action on only one of the committee’s recommendations—extending the life of the committee. The GAO said the Department and NNSA were in varying stages of reviews to advance the other 28 recommendations, and had standardized protective force personnel uniforms and the cloth shields used on the uniforms in response to part of one recommendation. The group categorized 14 of its 29 recommendations as “low” or “no-cost” actions, which included expanding fitness and wellness programs, reviews of training requirements and a study on maximizing the number of armed and unarmed positions that could be held by protective force officers when they can’t meet more rigorous physical requirements. “The responsibility lies with DOE, working with protective force unions and contractors, to further develop and implement these initiatives and recommendations,” the GAO said. “However, if DOE decides not to take meaningful actions or if its actions will not achieve the intended goals, an examination of other options, including the federalization of the protective forces, may be merited.”

### **Issue Has Been ‘Studied to Death’**

The Project on Government Oversight watchdog group also called on the Department to move quickly to address the problem. “It’s about time that DOE fixes this problem.

It has been studied to death,” said POGO Executive Director Danielle Brian. “As the GAO concludes—if DOE doesn’t solve the problem satisfactorily, then the guard forces should be federalized.”

Randy Lawson, the president of the Oak Ridge chapter of the International Guards Union of America, said he was disappointed with the Department’s response to the recommendations and hinted at difficult negotiations when protective force bargaining agreements next expire at Oak Ridge, Pantex and Savannah River in 2012. “We’ve made it known to DOE that if they don’t get these problems fixed, the membership has told us if we can’t do something with defined benefit plans or career longevity, it’s going to be a tough negotiation,” Lawson said. “They’re already talking strike at all three sites.” Michael Kane, the NNSA’s Associate Administrator for Management and Administration, said the agency generally agreed with the GAO report and its recommendations, but said the report “does not give full credit to the Department for significant efforts taken to address protective force issues.”

—Todd Jacobson

### **DESPITE SHIPPING PROGRESS, MOAB SHORT ON RECOVERY ACT DISPOSAL**

While recent updates from the Department of Energy’s Moab cleanup project have lauded the progress being made in shipping uranium mill tailings off-site for disposal, the project is lagging behind in its disposal targets for Recovery Act-funded work. According to DOE, the project to date has disposed of 139,279 tons of material using Recovery Act funds—33,935 tons less than the target. Disposal of uranium mill tailings is one of two areas, out of seven, where DOE has fallen behind in meeting its Recovery Act progress targets, with the other being “demolition debris and soil permanently disposed,” according to the DOE Office of Environmental Management’s Web site. DOE did not return calls for comment on the issue last week.

The Moab project has been allocated approximately \$108 million in Recovery Act funds, which are intended to allow DOE and cleanup contractor EnergySolutions to double the amount of uranium mill tailings to be disposed of by the end of Fiscal Year 2011—from 2 million tons to 4 million. Overall, the former tailings pile consists of approximately 16 million tons of material. According to a DOE press release last month, more than 680,000 tons of mill tailings have been shipped from the west bank of the Colorado River to a disposal cell outside of Crescent Junction, Utah, and more than 40 percent of this quantity