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ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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March 17, 2009

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The Honorable Gene Dodaro  
Acting Comptroller General  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G St., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Since the 1940s, the Department of Energy (DOE) and its predecessors have operated a nationwide complex of facilities used to research, design, and manufacture nuclear weapons and related technologies. While these activities are important for national defense, they have left a legacy of radioactive and other hazardous wastes that have contaminated or could contaminate the environment. DOE's Office of Environmental Management (EM) spends billions of dollars annually on cleanup efforts. Cleanup projects include treating and permanently disposing of millions of gallons of waste stored in underground tanks at several sites; decontaminating and demolishing buildings and other facilities no longer in use; removing and disposing of contaminated soil; treating contaminated groundwater; and treating and permanently disposing of transuranic wastes—typically, discarded rags, tools, equipment, soils, or other solid materials that have been contaminated by man-made radioactive elements, such as plutonium or americium.

EM relies heavily on contractors to carry out its cleanup mission. DOE's contractors generally carry out these missions by managing the department's projects; DOE program managers and federal project directors oversee the contractors' efforts. DOE's contract management, including both contract administration and project management, however, has been on GAO's High-Risk list since the list's inception in 1990, because of the risk of fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement.

Over the years, GAO has carried out numerous engagements evaluating EM's contract and project management and made dozens of recommendations. These recommendations collectively call for DOE to ensure that project management requirements are consistently

followed to improve oversight of contractors and to strengthen accountability for performance. Although DOE's responses to these recommendations have been largely positive, and some corrective actions have been taken, many of the recommendations are still open, awaiting action by the department. Further, despite steps DOE has taken to improve project management, such as developing a root-cause analysis to identify weaknesses and a corrective action plan, EM's complex and costly projects often continue to exceed cost and schedule targets.

The recently passed stimulus plan provides EM with an additional \$5 billion. In light of EM's continuing difficulties in managing cost and schedule targets for cleanup projects, we would like GAO to respond to the following questions.

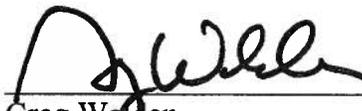
1. How did DOE select projects on which to spend the stimulus funding? What assumptions were used to prioritize work and develop cost and schedule targets, and how realistic were these assumptions?
2. What performance measures will DOE use to show that these additional funds are maximizing risk reduction, achieving accelerated cleanup goals, or reducing overall cleanup costs?
3. To what extent has there been any independent review of cost, schedule, and approach for this additional work, including by the Office of Engineering and Construction Management and the Office of Independent Cost Analysis?
4. To what extent has DOE assessed the successes, failures, and lessons learned from its 2002 accelerated cleanup program to ensure that implementation of its proposed accelerated plan will achieve DOE goals?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. Please work with Mr. Peter Spencer of the Minority Committee Staff at (202) 225-3641 on the specifics of your study.

Sincerely,



Joe Barton  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce



Greg Walden  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

cc: The Honorable Henry Waxman, Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Bart Stupak, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations