



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on May 20, 2009

Nuclear Cleanup Funds Mismanaged

The Washington Post points out that “contractors helped shape the stimulus package and are lined up to get the work, including many that have been cited for serious safety violations and costly mistakes.” The cleanup program “has long been plagued by cost overruns and delays and is designated by the Government Accountability Office as ‘at high risk for fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement.’ Over the past two years, estimated cleanup costs at all 22 sites have escalated from \$180 billion to \$240 billion, according to the Energy Department.”



Some examples mentioned in *The Washington Post* article will give an idea of the scope of the problem. Bechtel Jacobs was hired to clean up an Oak Ridge, Tennessee, site where two nuclear plants were abandoned in the 1960s. The company “fell behind schedule in 2005 and asked the Energy Department to authorize an accelerated plan for the work. But, according to government records, the company did not follow proper safety plans or accurately evaluate the first building’s condition before sending in workers.” A “worker fell through the floor and was seriously injured,” causing delays that combined with other problems to raise the cost of the cleanup from \$300 million to \$781 million. Now, Bechtel Jacobs “is slated to get \$118 million to help complete the job.”

Another contractor, Washington Closure Hanford, was cleaning up the Hanford nuclear site along the Columbia River in central Washington state about two years ago when “some workers who the company had hired were caught falsifying documents about their handling of nuclear waste, according to an investigation by the Environmental Protection Agency.” Now, Washington Closure Hanford “will receive \$254 million for additional cleanup work at the site.”

Of course, there is enough justifiable outrage to go around. *The Washington Post* mentions Senator Mark Begich (D-Alaska), who asked at a hearing last month: “These contractors know they are going to get the business. What has been the penalty when they exceeded costs?” Senator Begich also inquired, “Over the past four years, how many contracts have been terminated?” The *Post* reports that the acting assistant secretary for environmental management, Inés Triay, responded by saying that “no contractors lost jobs for poor performance during that period.”

Gene Aloise, the director of natural resources and environment for the U.S. Government Accountability Office, indicated that staff members at the Energy Department “need to be reminded that they are there to oversee the contractors, to protect the taxpayer’s dollars.” And that is the point: it is the hard-earned money confiscated from taxpayers that President Obama’s stimulus program is throwing around so cavalierly in a vain attempt to spend our way to prosperity. When such large quantities of taxpayer dollars are being tossed out, mismanagement of funds is the least that one can expect, with the buying of favors and outright fraud not far behind. If government is not contained and constrained at the size of the small nucleus authorized by the Constitution, then it will explode in an out-of-control reaction. The Energy Department’s loose handling of funds is merely part of the fallout of this explosion.

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