

Navy considers Idaho for site to process nuclear fuel

By KEITH RIDLER, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — The U.S. Navy wants to build a \$1.6 billion facility at a federal nuclear site in eastern Idaho to handle spent fuel from the nation's fleet of nuclear-powered warships.

The Navy and U.S. Department of Energy are taking public comments through Aug. 10 on a draft environmental impact statement for the jointly operated Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program at the Idaho National Laboratory.

Officials said a new facility at the 890-square-mile site is needed to replace decades-old, outdated installations to keep nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and submarines deployed. Continuing to use existing facilities, the document said, isn't viable because it could result in no longer being able to handle the nuclear waste in a safe or environmentally responsible way.

"Without significant upgrades and refurbishments, the existing facility will not be able to meet the requirements of the U.S. Navy's nuclear-powered fleet," Tom Dougan, spokesman for the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program, said in an email to The Associated Press on Friday.

Kerry Martin, an Idaho National Laboratory Oversight Program manager with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, said the state agency is in favor of the plan.

"We actually think it's a very good thing," she said. "If we make comments (on the draft document), we will be in support of it. I can't say we feel that way about everything, but on this one we certainly do."

The 81-page draft document notes that the Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier is scheduled for delivery in 2016 and that new nuclear-powered submarines are also under construction. The new facility would be able to handle a new type of spent fuel shipping container, which is not possible at the current facility. The new facility would also have a larger pool of water to cool the radioactive material.

"The Navy fuel is highly enriched uranium," Martin said. "When they defuel the ships, it needs to go into water storage."

Construction on the new facility, if approved, would last three years and give the Navy flexibility to meet future needs, the draft document said.

Public meetings on the draft document are planned in early August in Idaho Falls, Pocatello and Twin Falls.

