United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 15, 2009

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Chairman Inouye and Ranking Member Cochran:

As you develop economic stimulus legislation, we trust you will consider the need to address the cleanup of the Department of Energy's environmental liabilities and provide stimulus funding for cleanup work at DOE sites. Increasing funding by $6 billion will create over 10,000 jobs and accelerate protection of human health and the environment. Using contracts that are already in place, the increased levels of spending would stimulate the economy in many areas across the country. In addition, the accelerated environmental remediation would provide land that could have other beneficial uses, such as energy parks. Energy parks would create long-term jobs and help reduce America's reliance on foreign sources of energy.

DOE's liabilities represent the environmental legacy resulting from the production of nuclear weapons over the course of several decades and account for the vast majority of this nation's environmental liabilities. Indeed, DOE has characterized the cleanup of its sites as the largest environmental cleanup program in the world.

In 1989 DOE created the Environmental Management program to reduce the threats to heath, safety, and the environment posed by contamination and waste at DOE weapons complex facilities across the country, including major sites located in New York, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina, New Mexico, Nevada, Idaho, and Washington.

Cleanup at these sites and others has continued over the years but at a very slow pace. By all reasonable estimates DOE's environmental liabilities are currently in the range of $300 billion. In addition to cleanup costs, DOE spends huge sums of money on "landlord" or "mortgage" costs associated with maintaining safety envelopes for the sites and simply "keeping the lights on." For example, the annual landlord costs for the Portsmouth site in Ohio are approximately $110M/year. Since the mid-1990's, DOE's spending to address its environmental liabilities has fluctuated from a high of $7.3 billion in FY 05 to a low of $5.5 billion in the agency's FY 09 budget request. The agency estimates that it will take as many as another 50 years or more to cleanup its environmental liabilities.

Virtually all DOE weapons complex sites operate under consent orders and other regulatory agreements with state and federal environmental agencies that require DOE to manage and cleanup hazardous and radioactive contamination and to protect against risks to human health and safety and the environment. However, DOE continues to violate a significant number of these agreements. In most cases, these violations result from a lack of adequate funding causing milestones to be missed, cleanup schedules to be delayed and commitments to local communities, regulators, and states to fall by the wayside.

Communities that have hosted DOE facilities since the 1940's and 50's and their workforces have made important contributions to this nation's national defense, but with the end of the Cold War production work at these facilities came to a halt and the communities have been left with contaminated facilities and polluted soil and groundwater. It is time to get these facilities cleaned up so workforces, surrounding communities, and the nation as a whole can take advantage of the vast infrastructure and potential reuse applications at these sites.

When DOE has received sufficient funds to allow cleanups to be accelerated, thereby removing its environmental footprint, the agency has experienced significant cleanup successes and significant taxpayer savings. Such cleanups at Rocky Flats, Colorado and Fernald and the nearly completed Mound Site in Ohio have been success stories. For example, DOE estimates that by accelerating the cleanup of the Rocky Flats site it completed the work nearly fifty years and $30 billion below initial estimates. The faster these sites are cleaned up the sooner "mortgage" costs can be avoided and the sooner the sites can be put back into productive use.

The primary obstacles to accomplishing the cleanup of DOE's weapons sites is insufficient funding and reprogramming of allocated funds to other Department programs. Much of the DOE cleanup work involves digging up buried waste, remediating soils and groundwater, and decontaminating and decommissioning large buildings, and it requires large numbers of workers. This work is being performed now and can be expedited by the infusion of additional funding. These "green jobs" produce visible physical progress and are an investment in the environment and the future well-being of local communities. For example, three cleanup sites mentioned above are now back in productive use; Rocky Flats and Fernald are now recreation and wildlife areas and Mound is on track to become an active industrial and technology park.

We strongly urge the Committee to support additional DOE Environmental Management funding in the economic stimulus package and ensure that it is not reprogrammed by DOE for other purposes. It will not only create thousands of jobs but it will also protect the environment.

Sincerely,