EXHIBIT L

PLUTONIUM DISPOSITION

Proposed Dilute and Dispose Approach Highlights Need for More Work at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

What GAO Did This Study

The United States has pledged to dispose of 34 metric tons of surplus, weapons-grade plutonium. The current U.S. approach relies on disposing of the plutonium by irradiating it as MOX fuel—a mixture of plutonium and uranium oxides—in modified commercial nuclear reactors. Due to a significant rise in cost, DOE recently proposed terminating the MOX approach in favor of the dilute and dispose approach, which DOE stated may be less expensive. Under this approach, plutonium would be diluted with inert material and then disposed of in a geologic repository.

Why GAO Did This Study

Highlights

- DOE’s TRU waste management plan, which includes planning for WIPP, covers a 5-year period and does not address possible expansion. Moreover, DOE’s TRU waste management plan does not include a schedule for expanding DOE’s disposal space before existing space is full.
- Expanding WIPP’s disposal space will require regulatory approval that is expected to take several years. However, DOE modeling that is needed to begin the regulatory approval process is not expected to be ready until 2024.

What GAO Recommends

- DOE’s TRU waste management plan, which includes planning for WIPP, covers a 5-year period and does not address possible expansion. Moreover, DOE’s TRU waste management plan does not include a schedule for expanding DOE’s disposal space before existing space is full.
- Expanding WIPP’s disposal space will require regulatory approval that is expected to take several years. However, DOE modeling that is needed to begin the regulatory approval process is not expected to be ready until 2024.