

## Government is spending millions on special cartons for storing nuclear material

*That's nothing comparable to the waste of Government money at all the other remediation sites across the country ... and of course, in Washington.*

Knoxville News  
March 6, 2006

The government is spending millions of dollars on specially designed stainless-steel boxes to house the nation's stockpile of bomb-grade uranium.

Oak Ridge contractors already have purchased about 1,000 of the "rackable can storage boxes," and more are on the way.

The Bush administration's proposed budget for 2007 includes money to buy another 500 of the boxes that will be used in a new \$350 million uranium storehouse at the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant.

Steven Wyatt, a federal spokesman at Y-12, would not specify how many of the boxes will be needed at the high-security storage complex, which is under construction and scheduled for completion early next year. "The total need will depend on operational requirements," he said without explanation.

Y-12's engineering staff designed the coffin-like boxes, but two companies in the Midwest are manufacturing the steel containers and a special filler material – BoroBond – that absorbs neutrons to enhance the nuclear safety of storing nearly pure U-235, uranium's fissionable isotope.

Wyatt said the National Nuclear Security Administration, a part of the U.S. Department of Energy, has spent about \$8 million acquiring the new storage boxes. About 900 are already stored here.

Budget documents for 2007 indicate that \$10 million is being proposed to purchase another 500 boxes and to accelerate some related security activities at Y-12.

"Use of (the specially designed boxes) allows more enriched uranium to be stored in a smaller space, thus reducing the size and cost of the facility where they will be stored," Wyatt said in response to questions. Each box is 3 feet by 4 feet with a lid.

Although prototypes of the boxes have been publicly displayed in years past at safety exhibits and other locations and written about in technical publications, the government is restricting some information as Y-12 prepares to load uranium into the new storage complex.

Wyatt said the boxes are fabricated by Mid-America Precision Products in Joplin, Mo., and shipped to Eagle-Picher Technologies in Quapaw, Okla, where the filler material is placed inside the containers. Eagle-Picher then ships the boxes to Y-12, he said.