FRIB's environmental impact to be minimal

By Zane McMillin | Originally Published: 03/29/10 11:22pm | Modified: 03/29/10 11:50pm | 6 comments

More information:

FRIB impact

A preliminary assessment of potential hazards posed by the forthcoming Facility for Rare Isotope Beams, or FRIB, found the facility will not have a significant impact on the environment.

The 156-page assessment, compiled by the U.S. Department of Energy and released in mid-March, analyzed potential environmental impacts ranging from air and water quality to traffic disruptions.

Although no significant negative impact was found, the assessment contained several minor impacts, including a prolonged period of lane closures on Shaw Lane and Bogue Street.

Construction on the $550-million facility is scheduled for 2012, with completion expected by 2017.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Science

The $550-million Facility for Rare Isotope Beams, or FRIB, poses no serious environmental threats to MSU, according to a preliminary assessment of the facility’s potential impact on its surroundings.

A draft of the 156-page assessment found no significant impacts will occur before, during and after FRIB’s construction, which tentatively is scheduled to begin in 2012 and be completed by 2017.

The draft assessment was completed by the U.S. Department of Energy, or DOE, Office of Science in mid-March. It took about four months to draft.

FRIB is a nuclear research facility that will use cutting-edge technology to allow researchers to study rare atoms, or isotopes.

The draft assessment analyzed FRIB’s potential environmental impacts, such as detriments to land, water and air quality, noise and traffic disruptions, health and safety concerns and possible destruction of historical or cultural items in the area, said Brian Quirke, director of communications for the DOE.

“The environmental assessment is actually designed to determine whether or not a full-blown environmental impact statement is necessary,” Quirke said.

“The bottom line here is we found no significant environmental impacts.”

Lane closures around the construction site, which will be located at the Cyclotron’s current location, were among the more noteworthy parts of the assessment, Quirke said.

According to the report, lane closures could affect the area around the construction site for up to two years, mostly affecting Shaw Lane and Bogue Street.

No significant impacts on the health and safety of workers at FRIB and the surrounding area were found, except for typical construction site hazards during that phase of the project, said Ron Lutha, the federal project manager for FRIB.

Lutha also said any concerns of radiation or other harmful substance exposure once FRIB is up and running can be put to rest, as the facility will be designed to minimize such impacts.

“We’re doing everything possible to make the public and workers safe,” Lutha said.

Thomas Glasmacher, FRIB’s project director for MSU, said the project’s team was pleased with the environmental assessment’s findings.

“We want to be a good neighbor on the MSU campus,” Glasmacher said.
“We’re committed to an open and transparent process. I’m glad so many people took interest in the environmental assessment.”

Quirke said the assessment was not required but was commissioned anyway to look into more obvious concerns, such as potential exposure to radiation, and concerns brought up at a public meeting held in November to discuss possible impacts, such as noise from construction.

Another public meeting was held last Wednesday to discuss the draft assessment.

Quirke said although that meeting was not as well-attended as last fall’s, no serious concerns were brought up at either meeting.

Quirke said public comment still will be accepted by phone, e-mail, letter or similar avenues until April 16.

A copy of the draft assessment is available online at www.frib.msu.edu.

“We probably will not be conducting another meeting, but there is another length of time where people have the opportunity to say ‘I like this’ or ‘I don’t like that,’” Quirke said.

Commentary

Add your $0.02, go to the comment form or follow the comment feed

student

(03/30/10 2:40am)
Report

Show me the money!
Let’s get the this done.

Joel Reinstein

(03/30/10 11:34am)
Report

“The bottom line here is we found no significant environmental impacts.”

What qualifies as “significant?” I’m skeptical, and I would like to see what campus environmental groups are saying. Are they not commenting? Are they adamantly opposed, mildly skeptical, or completely fine with this?

Bob The Builder

(03/30/10 12:58pm)
Report
The campus environmental groups are a joke. They’re protesting the destruction of the ‘wetland’ where the new art museum is going up. Apparently they haven’t been here long enough to remember that there used to be a building chilling on that spot.

common sense

(03/30/10 4:32pm)
Report

Okay, “campus environmental groups” are cute and useful when they’re campaigning for recycling or solar panels and useful services or even protesting some corporation that obviously greased some officials, but I doubt they’re educated enough to even sniff a 100 page environmental impact assessment.

Plus, a lot of things are way overdone. Just read the paperwork to run an experiment at a government facility, jeez.

Its a joke

(03/30/10 5:12pm)
Report

I’m a civil engineer working for environmental firm just outside of DC and have completed numerous EA’s. We write long complicated reports so that nobody can understand them. Usually, there’s nothing to them. However, sometimes we have found plans might impact certain criteria, such as, cutting down a tree with a nest in it or finding a tadpole. My theory…that’s why God created chainsaws.

OldTimer

(03/30/10 5:23pm)
Report

When I arrived at MSU (1970) there was a working nuclear reactor in the Engineering Building, not for power but to aid the training of engineers. Farther south, near what they now call “Incinerator Road,” numerous signs warned of the buried radioactive waste.

MSU did a good cleanup job on both sites, and showed close attention to risk management. Then and now.

If you worry about such stuff, look less at the FRIB site and more at the various labs for chemical and life sciences. The universal symbols for radiation and hazmat are easy to spot.