

Partners unveil new name in bid for AECL

July 9, 2014 by Terry Myers

Innovation is the key to future success, and innovation is at the heart of the new name for one of the groups bidding to operate the Chalk River Laboratories.

Babcock & Wilcox, Cavendish Nuclear and the Battelle Memorial Institute have been partners since last year in a consortium seeking to operate Chalk River under the federal government's proposed "government owned, contractor operated" (GoCo) model.

Last week, the partners announced that they have come together under a new name – the Innovation Canada Alliance.

Speaking to an invitation-only crowd at the Pembroke waterfront, John McQuarrie, president of Babcock & Wilcox Canada, said the federal government is looking for a team that can manage AECL's facilities at Chalk River and elsewhere, "and we want to be that team."

"We have the expertise and the vision that can take the facilities at AECL and continue to make them leaders in the global nuclear innovation field," he said. "We think that vision will serve Canadians well for many years to come, as AECL has for many years in the past."

McQuarrie said all three partners in the alliance have a wealth of experience operating nuclear facilities and labs in the United States and Britain.

"We've been pretty successful at working with those types of facilities to develop and really grow the science and technology mission that those offer Canadians," he said.

"It's that kind of innovation that we want to continue to see prosper and grow and we believe we can help play a role in that."

The federal government is currently screening potential bidders to operate Chalk River through a "Request for Response Evaluation" (RFRE).

Joe Oliver, then the federal Minister of Natural Resources, announced the launch of the RFRE round back in March.

"This is a significant step forward in implementing our plan to engage a private-sector partner in managing the nuclear laboratories," Oliver said.

"We are working to bring private-sector rigour and efficiencies to all aspects of the nuclear laboratories.

"The goal remains to put in place the conditions for Canada's nuclear industry to succeed, while reducing cost and risk for Canadian taxpayers over time."

The deadline to enter the RFRE is August 6.

Companies that qualify will be able to take part in the next step, submitting a bid under a "Request for Proposals" (RFP) to operate the labs.

The final RFP is expected to be released next fall, with a “preferred bidder” chosen in the spring and a final contract signed in “summer/fall 2015.”

Roger Anderson, technical advisor with Battelle, said his company has had a long history of managing and operating major science and technology facilities, and that nuclear science and technology has typically been “one of the core focal points” for those organizations.

In his own career, Anderson said he has been focused on “institution building” – building new science and technology organizations “or helping existing ones transform their mission to become more relevant to the challenges facing them.”

“One of the key elements in all those assignments has been our ability to leverage – working with partners in the community, working with the supply chain – the science and technology underpinning nuclear energy into national and regional economic development opportunities,” he said.

“We really think the same is being done here and can probably be expanded and we really look forward to working with the community to do that.”

Greg Alexander, director of Canadian business for Cavendish Nuclear, said it’s an exciting time for his company in Britain, as they have just been chosen as the preferred bidder on the Magnox decommissioning project, worth \$12 billion over 12 years.

Overall, he said, Cavendish has a “tier one or tier two” presence at every one of the 35 nuclear sites in the UK.

“So, a very significant presence, and we’re very keen to bring that to bear here in Canada as well,” he said.

Alexander said he began his career as a naval officer, where he learned to view issues through the questions, “what is the public good?” and “what is the national interest?”

“When I’ve asked those questions of AECL over the past couple of years, it’s no surprise I’ve become very attached to AECL and to what it can be and should be and already is to serve Canada’s national interest (and) to serve the good of Canada and all Canadians,” he said.

“So I’m very much on board with the mission and very excited to be part of the Innovation Canada Alliance, to be part of the solution (and) to be a significant change agent over the next number of years to help AECL be all that it can be for Canada and all Canadians.”

Pembroke Mayor Ed Jacyno welcomed the partners to his city and said he has faith in the future of Chalk River.

Jacyno was part of a delegation of local officials who travelled to GoCo sites in the US late last fall.

He said he was “truly amazed” by what the group saw.

“It seems that wherever the Babcock & Wilcox group were, magic was happening, and we want to see the same magic happen here,” he said.