

DATE: April 20, 2006

SUBJECT: University of Tennessee Knoxville to Restructure and Rename the Center of Excellence in Waste Management Research and Education Institute to the “Institute for a Secure and Sustainable Environment”

ACTION RECOMMENDED: Approval

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Centers of Excellence have been in operation for over 25 years. In July 2005, the Commission recommended that it was time for a re-assessment and evaluation of the Centers, to determine if changes are needed to improve and refocus their research emphasis. To date, changes have been and approved for Centers at the University of Tennessee Martin, Chattanooga, and Tennessee Technological University.

The initial research of the Center of Excellence in Knoxville in Waste Management Research and Education (WMREI), established in 1985, focused on waste related issues. Since its inception, it has attracted \$55 million in external funds. The goals established for that center were “to create a nationally recognized research center in chemical, nuclear, and solid-waste management research and education; help promote a safe and proper management of hazardous wastes and work cooperatively with public and private organizations within the region to help develop solutions to waste-management problems that confront the state and nation.” Working with the U.S. Department of Energy at Oak Ridge, Tennessee Valley Authority, and numerous state and private agencies, the WMREI has made significant contributions to achieve these goals.

START-UP DATE: Upon approval

MISSION: Since the 1990’s the research focus and mission of the WMREI has evolved and expanded to environmental sustainability, that involving multiple disciplines that cross industrial segments, political boundaries, and populations. Under the proposed new name and structure, the Center can have a research agenda that engages faculty from a wide range of disciplines and departments. The Center has developed strategies for preventing pollution, studying explosives and dangerous chemical or biological agents, diseases caused from exposure, and responses to terrorism and natural disasters. The current name no longer accurately depicts the mission of the center as it exists today, and may impede the ability to secure research funding outside the field of waste management.

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE: The new director would be identified through a national search to manage the proposed new center. Required staff would include an Assistant Director of Grants and Contracts, an Assistant Director of Publications and Communications, an Assistant Director of Programs and Outreach and a Senior Administrative Assistant.

The proposed new name and restructuring will have greater flexibility, a broader research focus on environmental issues that relate to water resources, environmental security, energy economics, environmental education, social perspectives, and environmental sustainability. Collectively, these program areas encompass a broad, interrelated focus on environmental and security research.

ADVISORY BOARDS: An internal advisory board comprised of senior faculty and administrators is planned to explore research strategies, funding sources, topics of investigation, self-assessment methodologies, and future initiatives.

An external advisory board also is planned, comprised of representatives from industry, foundations, and government agencies to focus on environmental issues and advise the Center.

COSTS: Under the provisions for the revised and renamed Center, associated costs will be covered within the same operating budget that supports the original Center.

EVALUATION: Annual evaluations will be conducted on the operation of the Center, as approved to determine the extent to which established benchmarks are being achieved. Evaluations will be based on the assessment of the center director and advisory boards. Annual fiscal reports and 5-year summative reports also are required.