

PNNL deputy associate director to lead ORNL isotopes directorate

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Balendra Sutharshan has joined ORNL as associate laboratory director for the Isotope Science and Engineering Directorate. Credit: Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, U.S. Dept. of Energy

Balendra Sutharshan, deputy associate laboratory director for operational systems at the Department of Energy's Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, has joined Oak Ridge National Laboratory as associate laboratory director for the Isotope Science and Engineering Directorate, or ISED.

Sutharshan succeeds Alan Icenhour, who has been appointed as ORNL's next deputy for operations. Before joining PNNL, Sutharshan served as chief operations officer for the Energy and Global Security Directorate at Argonne National Laboratory and spent nearly 20 years in a series of leadership roles with Westinghouse.

Isotope research, production, discovery, and application has been a key component of ORNL's national missions since its founding during the Manhattan Project.

"The capabilities pioneered and developed here are critical for science, medicine, industry, and security," ORNL Director Thomas Zacharia said. "Balendra brings a track record of both public- and private-sector leadership to these essential missions, with a demonstrated ability to integrate research and operations in order to improve existing programs and support new initiatives."

At Westinghouse, Sutharshan held a series of engineering and leadership positions including as director of strategy and business development and as the leader responsible for oversight of strategic and long-term goals for the nuclear fuel business unit. His responsibilities included reactor design, product development, strategic planning, business analysis, supply-chain management and establishment of international partnerships.

“The opportunity to lead the organization entrusted with ORNL’s remarkable capabilities in isotope science and engineering is not a privilege I take lightly,” Sutharshan said. “I look forward to doing all I can to maximize the impact and productivity of the lab’s isotope missions.”

Sutharshan holds a doctorate in nuclear engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; a master’s in chemical and nuclear engineering and a bachelor’s in chemical engineering from the University of Toronto; and an MBA from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

ISED was established in fall 2020 to sharpen the laboratory’s focus on the vital science and technology advancements necessary to expand the application and production of isotopes for science, medicine, industry and security.