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Workers treat record amount of Hanford groundwater

RICHLAND, Wash. – Workers at the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Hanford Site treated a record amount of groundwater to remove contamination in the last year, operating facilities that treated 2.1 billion gallons of groundwater.

“We’re treating more groundwater and removing more contamination than any year in the past two decades of cleanup,” said Michael Cline, director of the soil and groundwater division with the DOE Richland Operations Office. “Not only are we treating more groundwater each year, we’re also removing more contamination and expanding the area we’re pumping from to remove contamination.”

DOE set a goal for contractor CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company (CH2M) to treat 2.1 billion gallons by the end of the fiscal year, which began in October 2014 and runs through September 2015. CH2M met this key performance goal more than a month ahead of schedule in mid-August and removed more than 75 tons of contaminants from groundwater during the fiscal year.

“Our groundwater treatment programs are designed to protect the river, by slowing the spread of contamination near the river and preventing contamination in the center of the Hanford Site from making its way to the river,” said Karen Wiemelt, vice president of soil and groundwater remediation for CH2M.

CH2M also exceeded last year’s treatment record of 1.9 billion gallons. To date, Hanford contractors have treated more than 13 billion gallons of groundwater and removed more than 200

tons of contaminants, including nitrate, carbon tetrachloride, hexavalent chromium, uranium, and technetium-99.

Six pump-and-treat systems treat groundwater at Hanford by pumping groundwater up through wells and treating it to remove contaminants, before the water is re-injected into the ground.

“We continue to find innovative ways to increase treatment capacity,” said Wiemelt. “As a whole, our systems are operating at about 113 percent of their designed capacity and, with several upgrades we’ll finish this year, that number will be even higher.”

The groundwater contamination resulted from operations to produce plutonium from the 1940s through the end of the 1980s. Since 2009, CH2M has more than quadrupled the groundwater treatment capacity at the Hanford Site, from 500 million gallons a year to 2.1 billion gallons a year.

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The Department of Energy’s Richland Operations Office (DOE-RL) manages the Hanford Site near Richland, Washington. Along with the DOE Office of River Protection (ORP), DOE-RL is responsible for the federal government’s cleanup of the legacy of more than 40 years of plutonium production at Hanford for the nation’s defense. Except for the tank waste mission managed by ORP, DOE-RL is responsible for cleanup of all remaining Hanford waste streams and is currently focused on cleaning out and demolishing the high-hazard Plutonium Finishing Plant, excavating and disposing of contaminated soil and solid waste, treating contaminated groundwater, moving radioactive sludge out of the K West Basin and away from the Columbia River, and configuring Hanford Site infrastructure for the future. DOE-RL is also responsible for working with the National Park Service to implement and manage Hanford’s portion of the new Manhattan Project National Historical Park, authorized by Congress in 2014. The office oversees Hanford Site work that is conducted by a federal and contractor workforce of approximately 4,200 personnel. Visit www.hanford.gov.