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Hanford Site receives national recognition

The Record of Decision (ROD) for Hanford's U Plant has won national recognition from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It was selected by EPA as one of three "RODs of the Year" written in fiscal year 2005 in the national Superfund Program.

Craig Cameron, project manager in the Hanford Project office of EPA's Region 10, accepted the award in Washington, D.C. on April 19. The Department of Energy (DOE), EPA, and the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) signed the ROD for the U Plant Canyon last fall. The decision is regarded as a significant step toward addressing hazards from former nuclear chemical separation facilities on Hanford's Central Plateau.

"The EPA review committee liked how clearly the ROD covered the rationale for remedy selection and its coverage of the cleanup objectives, as well as the robust treatment of institutional controls necessary before and after completion of the remedy," said Cameron. "The ROD is the culmination of years of remedial investigation and feasibility study work by the three agencies and the contractors."

The ROD is the decision document that will govern the dispositioning of the U Plant Canyon in a way that will result in the long-term protection of human health and the environment.

"Canyons" were built during the nuclear-defense era to dissolve fuel rods irradiated in production reactors and extract materials, such as plutonium, from the resulting solutions. Canyons are very large concrete structures, typically about 800 feet long. There are five former processing canyons at Hanford. While the U Plant was

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designed to extract plutonium, it was never used for this purpose. Instead, it was used to train nuclear operators, refurbish processing equipment from other canyons, and to recover uranium from tank waste.

“Our experience in developing this Record of Decision can be shared with other DOE sites,” said Kevin Leary, project manager with the DOE Richland Operations Office. “The agencies have already held a workshop to share their experience with other regulatory agencies and DOE sites, such as the Idaho National Laboratory and the Savannah River Site.”

The U Plant is the first of DOE’s canyons—at any of several sites across the country—for which a final cleanup decision has been issued. The U Plant ROD was written by EPA, with support from Ecology, DOE, and cleanup contractor Fluor Hanford.

“There were several complex regulatory issues that the Tri-Party Agencies worked through to reach a final remedy that protects the environment and eliminates risk to the workers during cleanup,” said Rick Bond, facilities transition project manager for Ecology.

“While this ROD broke ground on several fronts, it is noteworthy that EPA recognized the U Plant ROD because it is very well written, easy to read, and best meets the EPA’s guidance on how to prepare a ROD,” said Julie Robertson, project manager, Fluor Hanford.

The selected remedy for U Plant involves the removal of some long-lived radionuclides from the facility and disposal to an out-of-state geologic repository, consolidation of contaminated equipment into below-grade cells, filling the equipment and cells with grout, collapsing the structure above the canyon deck, installation of an engineered soil barrier, and long-term monitoring. The 112-page ROD is available on the Hanford web site, www.hanford.gov, “Special Announcements” section.

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