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DOE

ENERGY SECRETARY MARKS CONSTRUCTION START OF HANFORD STORAGE CANISTER BUILDING

With sounds of construction in the air and enormous cranes towering nearby, U.S. Energy Secretary Hazel R. O'Leary today marked the official construction start-up of the facility that will provide interim storage to Hanford's aging and vulnerable spent nuclear fuel.

The Canister Storage Building, located near the center of the Hanford Site, is a critical part of the plan to move 2,300 tons of highly radioactive and corroding fuel from water-filled basins that sit precariously close to the Columbia River. The K East basin has leaked more than 15 million gallons of contaminated water since the 1970s.

"This building is another clear sign of the visible, tangible progress at Hanford. It demonstrates the Clinton administration's commitment to protect worker health and safety and the environment for future generations. And despite the tremendous and daunting task being undertaken, employees, regulators, stakeholders and residents continue to push ahead of schedule -- as a team," said O'Leary.

The Department of Energy's original commitment was to move the fuel out of the K basins by the year 2000, and complete fuel stabilization by 2005. Through a combination of unique initiatives by Secretary O'Leary and Hanford Managers, that schedule has been advanced significantly. Fuel will be out of the basins in 1999, and stabilization will be complete four years early -- in 2001. Schedule acceleration will save an estimated \$350 million.

Construction of the Canister Storage Building got a "running start" with the decision to take advantage of a partially-completed facility base that was started for another Hanford project. The Hanford Waste Vitrification Plant was halted in March 1993, leaving the building 10 percent complete. Re-use of that facility base will save one year and \$17 million dollars on the Canister Storage Building, which will be complete in October 1997.

Such fast-track progress would not be possible had the Department of Energy not changed the way it does business. Months were shaved off the project's normally lengthy decision-making process when Secretary O'Leary in June 1995 delegated authority for major spent fuel project decisions to Hanford Manager John Wagoner. For example, the project's Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision was signed by Wagoner in just 49 weeks.

"Clearly, Secretary O'Leary has made good on her promise to put more authority `where the rubber meets the road'," said Hanford Manager John Wagoner. "Working closely with our regulators and stakeholders, we've been able to push forward aggressively to resolve Hanford's greatest safety concern."

To emphasize her appreciation for the exceptional effort of DOE and Contractor project staff, the

Secretary dedicated a commemorative plaque that will be permanently mounted in the new facility.

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