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## **SOIL CLEANUP PROJECT BEGINS ALONG THE COLUMBIA RIVER**

The U.S. Department of Energy Richland Operations Office (DOE-RL) and Bechtel Hanford, Inc. (BHI) have started another major cleanup project along the Columbia River at the Hanford Site in southeastern Washington State.

The cleanup project entails removing nearly 150 thousand tons of contaminated soil and debris from cribs and trenches that held radioactive water discharged from the coolant system and fuel basin at Hanford's N Reactor on the Columbia River. The soil and debris will be safely disposed of in the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility (ERDF) - a massive disposal site for low-level solid waste generated by Hanford cleanup.

"This is another important activity to clean up the river corridor by moving radioactive materials away from the river to Hanford's Central Plateau for disposal," said Beth Bilson, RL's Assistant Manager for Waste Management and Environmental Restoration. "While cleaning up soil and materials along the river corridor isn't new for the department or Bechtel, the project at N Reactor does pose some new challenges."

Rick Donahoe, project lead for BHI, said the challenges facing BHI and subcontractor Foster Wheeler Environmental Corporation stem from the relatively short period since the reactor last operated. "It has only been 13 years since the N Reactor was permanently shut down," explained Donahoe. "This short period of inactivity resulted in radioactivity levels up to 50 times higher than at other soil cleanup sites."

To meet the challenge, DOE-RL, BHI and its subcontractors are taking extra precautions to minimize personnel radiation exposures and any impacts to the surrounding environment. "We have reviewed potential exposure issues at length with our crews and every person has received project-specific training," said Donahoe. "In addition, supplemental dosimeters will help us to monitor exposure and take whatever steps are necessary to keep people safe."

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) has regulatory oversight of the project at N Reactor. Rick Bond, N Area Project Lead for Ecology is pleased with preparation. "The project team

has been very thorough and professional," said Bond. "While the project is very challenging, the team has demonstrated it's ready to meet those challenges."

The N Cribs cleanup project is expected to take 26 months. N Reactor is one of Hanford's nine closed and deactivated plutonium production reactors along the Columbia River. N Reactor operated from 1963 to 1987 and was the only DOE reactor to simultaneously produce plutonium and generate electricity. The facility made national headlines when President John F. Kennedy visited Hanford to break ground for the nearby Hanford Generating Plant in September 1963.

RL and its contractors are restoring the Columbia River corridor by moving spent nuclear fuel, "cocooning" plutonium production reactors, addressing soil and groundwater contamination, and disposing of aging and unneeded buildings. To date, over 2.4 million tons of contaminated materials and soil along the river and other Hanford cleanup projects have been sent to the ERDF for disposal.

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**Historical Note:** The U.S. Department of Energy's Richland Operations Office manages the Hanford Site in southeastern Washington State. Hanford was established during World War II as part of the top secret Manhattan Project to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. Weapons material production was halted in the late 1980s. The Hanford Site is now engaged in the world's largest cleanup effort to deal with the legacy of radioactive and hazardous wastes that resulted from the plutonium production era. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington Department of Ecology regulate Hanford's cleanup program under a long-term compliance contract called the Tri-Party Agreement. This agreement sets the framework and timelines on the cleanup work so that Hanford meets environmental standards. Hanford cleanup is focused on three outcomes: restoring the Columbia River Corridor for other uses, transitioning the Central Plateau to long term waste treatment and storage, and preparing for the future.

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[\[Hanford Home Page\]](#) [\[Press Index\]](#)

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