DOE NEWS

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PLUTONIUM REMOVAL MILESTONE MET A YEAR AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

Security costs reduced; Efficiency improves

Workers at Hanford's Plutonium Finishing Plant have completed a Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) milestone to remove plutonium "hold up" in processing systems and equipment more than a year ahead of schedule, further reducing risk to the workers and the community.

"This project demonstrates continuing progress in our efforts to safely clean up the legacy of the Hanford site and meet our commitments with the EPA and the State of Washington," said Keith Klein, manager of the DOE's Richland Operations Office. "This is a significant step in decommissioning of former production buildings that posed a significant hazard to our community, and further paves the way for their ultimate demolition."

Crews with cleanup contractor Fluor Hanford removed and packaged more than 500 drums of plutonium "hold-up" more than a year ahead of the TPA milestone. The milestone called for removing significant quantities of plutonium held up in glove boxes, equipment, processing ventilation systems and canyon areas in order to reduce security requirements.

A formal security program with access controls and clearance requirements for personnel remains in place. At the same time, large portions of the facility are now more readily accessible to crews conducting decommissioning work. Security alarm systems and personnel access controls have been reconfigured to focus on supporting and facilitating the remaining work.

"Removing this plutonium hold-up material has reduced the risk to our employees and allows us to get more work done safely, less expensively and with higher efficiency," says Bruce Klos, Fluor Hanford vice president at the Plutonium Finishing Plant complex. "This accomplishment is a tribute to the employees and their commitment to performing work safely."

The hold-up material containing trace amounts of plutonium is being treated and packaged as transuranic waste, and will be shipped to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad, New Mexico for permanent disposal. A portion of the material, because of its higher concentration, was stabilized and packaged in triple-lined "3013" cans. The material will be stored onsite until a decision is made on its final disposition.

For decades during Hanford's historical defense mission, the Plutonium Finishing Plant and supporting facilities purified and converted plutonium solutions to a more useable form for weapons fabrication. In 2004, workers completed the daunting task of removing, stabilizing and packaging approximately 20 tons of plutonium-bearing material to prepare the facilities for cleanup and demolition. As a result of that campaign, Hanford has shipped about 1,800 drums of transuranic waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Project in Carlsbad, New Mexico, and packaged more than 2,100 "3013" cans for long-term storage.

Cleanup activities in the Plutonium Finishing Plant complex include the deactivation and decommissioning of 63 facilities, encompassing 231 glove boxes and laboratory hoods, 21 vaults, 4 process cells and 4 major chemical storage areas. To date, 10 support facilities have been decommissioned and demolished.

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