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DOE Resumes Waste Retrieval Activities at Hanford Double-Shell Tank

RICHLAND, Wash.—The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has resumed waste retrieval at Hanford’s double-shell tank AY-102. Waste retrieval from the tank was paused earlier this week after changes were detected in the level of waste in the annulus (the space between the inner and outer shells) of the tank. Monitoring and inspections show no visual or chemical indications that waste from the tank has leaked into the environment.

Earlier today, April 21, workers began pumping waste from the annulus space of tank AY-102 back into the primary tank using the annulus pumps, which were pre-installed for just such a contingency. Workers also resumed operations to remove waste from the primary tank to another double-shell tank.

Prior to commencing waste retrieval at tank AY-102, DOE and Hanford tank farms contractor Washington River Protection Solutions worked closely with the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) to conduct extensive planning, including the development of a Contingency Plan that addressed, among other things, the potential increase of waste in the AY-102 annulus space during the retrieval process. DOE anticipated that changes in the level of waste in the annulus could occur, as tank sludge waste was removed or shifted, potentially opening up a less obstructed leak path into the annulus.

“We were prepared for this event,” said Glyn Trenchard, DOE’s Deputy Assistant Manager for the Tank Farms. “Our workforce should be commended for their teamwork and perseverance in safely implementing the Contingency Plan and procedures, and resuming operations to remove waste from the tank.”

Since waste retrieval was initiated in early March, more than 95 percent of the material in tank AY-102 has been removed. DOE is working to meet an agreement with Ecology to complete waste retrieval at tank AY-102 by March 4, 2017. The Department and WRPS are committed to the safety of the Hanford workforce and the public, and the protection of the environment.

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