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Hanford Waste Treatment Plant receives and sets six-ton exhausters for air-filtration system

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RICHLAND, Wash.—Recently, the Hanford Waste Treatment Plant, also known as the “Vit Plant,” received and placed three nuclear-quality exhausters for its Low-Activity Waste Facility. The six-ton exhausters are key components in a complex air-filtration system that will ensure the facility’s air emissions meet strict environmental regulations and requirements.

The Low-Activity Waste Facility air-filtration system includes compliance monitoring equipment, HEPA filters, a carbon bed adsorber, caustic scrubbers, the exhausters and a more than 130-foot-tall emissions stack. The exhausters are essentially large fans that pull and channel process off-gas through the system equipment to ensure it is treated and filtered properly. Two of the three exhausters will operate full time; the remaining one will serve as a backup.

“The exhausters are crucial to the air-filtration system and to protecting the environment, workers and our surrounding communities,” John Platt, area project manager for the facility, said. “They meet all nuclear-quality standards and have undergone extensive testing to ensure they will remain functional during and after a seismic event.”

Each exhauster is made primarily of stainless steel and measures more than 13 feet long, 6 feet wide and nearly 7 feet high. They were lowered into place through the roof to the 48-foot elevation of the Low-Activity Waste Facility using a crane.

“These exhausters serve an important safety function for the plant and the environment,” Jeff Bruggeman, federal area project manager for the facility, said. “The Department of Energy appreciates the focus of the Vit Plant team in delivering a safe and quality system.”

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Bechtel National, Inc. is designing and building the world's largest radioactive waste treatment plant for the U.S. Department of Energy at the Hanford Site in southeastern Washington state. The Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant, also known as the "Vit Plant," will immobilize the radioactive liquid waste currently stored in 177 underground tanks using a process called "vitrification."

Vitrification involves blending the waste with molten glass and heating it to high temperatures. The mixture is then poured into stainless steel canisters. In this glass form, the waste is stable and impervious to the environment, and its radioactivity will dissipate over hundreds to thousands of years.

The Vit Plant will cover 65 acres with four nuclear facilities -- Pretreatment, Low-Activity Waste Vitrification, High-Level Waste Vitrification and Analytical Laboratory -- as well as operations and maintenance buildings, utilities and office space. Construction of the Vit Plant began in 2001 and is more than 60 percent complete.



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