

Plutonium Finishing Plant receives VPP Star status

Karen Welsh, Fluor Hanford

“The world’s best, dealing with the world’s worst.” That’s how Hanford’s Plutonium Finishing Plant, managed by Fluor Hanford, and its employees were described during a review that resulted in their achieving “Star” status recently in the Department of Energy’s Voluntary Protection Program.

PFP, where plutonium and its byproducts from past processing are being safely stabilized, is the seventh Fluor Hanford-managed facility, and the first plutonium facility in the DOE complex, to receive this award. “I think that is quite an achievement because of all of the dangerous work we do at PFP,” said Dena Bultena, a health physics technician at PFP. “I’m extremely proud to be part of the PFP team and its true commitment to working safely.”

The VPP program honors organizations that demonstrate excellence in safety across the DOE complex. To be eligible to receive VPP Star status, an organization is required to submit a VPP application and undergo a rigorous assessment of its safety procedures and work practices. In this case, the assessment was conducted by representatives of DOE Headquarters, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Fluor Hanford, the DOE Richland Operations Office and the Hanford Advisory Board.

During the assessment, PFP was evaluated on how its employees applied the five tenets of VPP — management commitment, employee involvement, work-site analysis, hazard prevention and control, and safety and health training.

Bultena and Bob Evans, a lead in PFP’s Safety and Health organization, assembled the team that worked on the VPP application. “We knew that everything was there for us to achieve this goal,” said Bultena, “because our employees don’t treat safety as a program — they truly *live* each day doing their work safely.”

The PFP team also just reached a milestone of a million safe work hours without a day lost to injury. This achievement represents 12 months of working safely while performing unique and dangerous tasks.



Employees at PFP prepare to raise the colorful VPP Star flag that will fly proudly below the stars and stripes.



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“There are extraordinary people working at PFP, where everyone works together on solving problems,” said Evans. “There is mutual accountability, and working safely is on everyone’s mind.”

PFP was recognized for achieving Star status during the President’s Zero Accident Council meeting on Aug. 21. “VPP gives us the confidence that there is integrity and safety out at PFP,” said DOE-RL manager Keith Klein.

Klein awarded the colorful VPP flag to acting PFP project director Scott Sax and other members of the PFP team. Employees proudly raised the new flag at the facility and were honored at a reception later that day.

Evans and Bultena attribute the achievement to employee involvement and management support. “If you truly incorporate the tenets and guiding principles of VPP and ISMS in your everyday work practices, you will see success,” Evans said proudly. “And that’s exactly what we’ve done.” ■

The PFP manager’s safety pledge

PFP managers are committed to getting work done safely, and each has signed the following statement:

- I recognize the importance of the PFP mission to our nation, to future job opportunities at Hanford, and to the Fluor Hanford Corporation.
- I value the people who work with me on the PFP team to accomplish the mission, and recognize that they (like me) make honest mistakes from time to time.
- I believe that my team functions best when I listen carefully and resolve error precursors and flawed defenses identified by my people before proceeding with work tasks.
- I understand my manager’s expectations of me with respect to the decisions I make in giving proper balance to safety and getting work done.
- I accept that my leadership and my team’s performance need to continuously improve in order for PFP to become the safest, most productive, and most cost-effective facility in the DOE.

Therefore, I commit today to examine my leadership style, and change any behavior that interferes with my people’s involvement in getting work done safely. I commit to encouraging involvement and effectively resolving concerns, recognizing the role I play in reducing errors within my team. I understand the value of systems like ISMS and VPP to help me solicit worker involvement and channel it into safe work.

Signature