

REACH



A publication of the U.S. Department of Energy for all Hanford Site employees

DOE to permanently deactivate Hanford's FFTF

After an exhaustive eight-month review of possible missions and future commercial uses for the Fast Flux Test Facility, the Department of Energy announced Dec. 19 that restart of the reactor is impractical and that deactivation of the reactor will proceed. The review ordered by Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham last April was conducted by a team led by Under Secretary Robert Card.

The review included an initial 90-day study of all previous reports and other information that might be relevant to a decision on the future of the FFTF. Card also studied expressions of interest by public and private groups to commercially operate the facility.

"I want to thank the FFTF review teams who committed countless hours to this process," Secretary Abraham said. "And in particular I want to thank Congressman Doc Hastings, who worked longer and harder than anyone else to identify options for the potential restart of the FFTF. This review was conducted in an objective, exhaustive and thorough manner. The department's final determination is based on sound science, an extensive analysis of the costs and benefits of disposition options and an in-depth consideration of the feasibility of commercial use options."

One commercial proposal submitted by Advanced Nuclear and Medical Systems proposed using the FFTF to produce medical and research isotopes. Abraham ordered an analysis of that proposal by the working group directed by Under Secretary Card. The team ultimately concluded that the ANMS proposal had significant drawbacks and presented new legal and financial liabilities for DOE. Separate consideration was given to a related DOE-funded research mission proposed by Argonne National Laboratory to use the facility as a demonstration project related to nuclear fuel issues. Both proposals were deemed to introduce liability and funding requirements for DOE that collectively could exceed \$2 billion.



FFTF employees have set safety records during years of standby operation while performing tasks such as this critical lift of the plant's solid waste cask. The cask is used for handling low- and medium-level reactor waste and spent fuel. FFTF workers recently completed more than 2 million safe work hours.

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Issues the review team referred to included:

- worker-related financing of operations
- the lack of identified commercial purchasers of medical and research isotopes
- DOE's assumption of costs associated with fuel disposal, as well as the department's assumption of costs associated with the ultimate decontamination and decommissioning of the site if the commercial operation by ANMS proved unsuccessful.
- questions regarding operational and safety oversight and approval of the FFTF by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, given the fact that the reactor was not originally built to NRC specifications.

Safety record set

On Dec. 5, FFTF employees completed two million hours of work without a lost-workday accident. "This achievement represents more than four years in which our entire staff of 245 employees has worked together in a concerted effort to avoid serious injury," said Bruce Klos, FFTF Project senior director.

The FFTF achieved DOE Voluntary Protection Program Gold Star status in July of this year. The project also received recognition at the Voluntary Protection Program Participants Association annual conference in August as one of five "Star of Excellence" sites.

The FFTF is probably best known for its history of 10 high-performance years as the safest and most technologically advanced test reactor for the Department of Energy. The plant has been in a shutdown and standby state since April 1992. ♦

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Keith Klein, Manager DOE Richland Operations Office	Harry Boston, Manager DOE Office of River Protection	
DOE Richland Operations Office Guy Schein, A7-75, 376-0413, fax 376-1563		
DOE Office of River Protection Diane Stock, H6-60, 376-4751, fax 372-1215		
Fluor Hanford Editorial office: B3-30, 376-4639, fax 376-5704 Jerry Holloway, manager of Communications Dennis Cresswell, editor Cornelia Brim, associate editor Sally Green, designer		
Bechtel Hanford, Inc. Sue Kuntz, H0-09, 375-4673, fax 372-9115		
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Pacific Northwest National Laboratory Katie Larson, K1-55, 375-3698, fax 375-2221		
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