



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
ENERGY

Richland Operations
Office



CH2MHILL

Joint DOE-CH2M HILL News Release

Media Contact:

Destry Henderson, CH2M HILL, (509) 376-8644,
destry_j_henderson@rl.gov
Geoff Tyree, DOE, (509)376-4171, geoffrey.tyree@rl.doe.gov

For Immediate Release:

September 10, 2014

WORKERS BEGIN CLEANING OUT HANFORD'S HISTORIC MCCLUSKEY ROOM

Safely cleaning out room is key step toward Plutonium Finishing Plant demolition

RICHLAND, Wash. – Workers have entered one of the most hazardous rooms at the Hanford Site in Washington state to begin final cleanup of a room that became known to workers over the years by the name of a worker injured there in a Cold War-era accident.

A crew with contractor CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company donned specially designed suits to protect them from contamination before entering the “McCluskey Room” at the site’s Plutonium Finishing Plant earlier this week. One of the first tasks for the crew is improving ventilation and airflow to better protect workers from the airborne contamination in the room as they clean out the room and its equipment.

“This was the first of multiple entries workers will make to clean out processing equipment and get the McCluskey Room ready for demolition along with the rest of the plant,” said Bryan Foley, federal project director for the Department of Energy. “It has taken a year to prepare for this first entry. The time and effort workers put into finding the right equipment and training will ensure they are as prepared as possible to remain safe during the cleanup.”

Over the next year, workers will remove large pieces of processing equipment, including glove boxes and tanks. Glove boxes are large, sealed containers with windows and glove ports that allowed workers to manipulate equipment inside while protecting them from contamination in the containers.

The room was used to recover americium – a highly radioactive plutonium byproduct – during the Cold War. The space is commonly referred to by workers as the “McCluskey Room,” after worker Harold McCluskey was injured in 1976 when a vessel inside a glove box burst and exposed him to radioactive material. McCluskey, who was 64 at the time, lived for 11 more years and died from causes not related to the accident.

Numerous hazards remain in the room as a result of the accident, including airborne radioactivity and surface contamination. For this work, employees are using advanced supplied-air systems and protective suits never before used on the Hanford Site. The suits offer better protection from surface contamination and chemicals, improved communication, and a dual-purpose air system that provides purified air for breathing and cool air throughout the suit. The system keeps the worker cooler, allowing them to work safer and for longer periods of time.

“The employees helped choose the equipment, trained on the equipment, and gave us feedback on its performance in training,” said Mike Swartz, CH2M HILL’s vice president for the Plutonium Finishing Plant Closure Project. “Their input helped us make some adjustments along the way and has been the key to being able to enter the room safely as we start this challenging cleanup project.”

Since 2008, the Department of Energy and contractor CH2M HILL have been preparing the Plutonium Finishing Plant for demolition by removing much of the equipment and infrastructure inside the building

that was once used for plutonium processing. Of the plant's 238 glove boxes, 212 have been removed or cleaned out and readied for removal during demolition. Out of 81 buildings that made up the plant during its history, 63 have been removed.

Media available:

- Video footage of an entry into the McCluskey Room earlier this week: http://youtu.be/eANRwA_29k4
- Video of preparations to enter the McCluskey Room: <http://youtu.be/K-6bTvzBVA4>

###

The Department of Energy's Richland Operations Office is responsible for several major cleanup projects on the Hanford Site, including cleanout and demolition of the high-hazard Plutonium Finishing Plant, demolition of excess facilities, excavation of contaminated soil and solid waste, and treatment of contaminated groundwater, as well as Hanford Site infrastructure. The office oversees approximately \$1 billion in annual funding for Hanford Site work that is conducted by a federal and contractor workforce of approximately 4,300 personnel. Visit www.hanford.gov.

Headquartered near Denver, Colo., employee-owned CH2M HILL is a global leader in consulting, design, design-build, operations and program management for government, civil, industrial and energy clients. The firm's work is concentrated in the areas of environment, energy, facilities, transportation and water. With \$6.6 billion in revenue and over 26,000 employees, CH2M HILL is an industry-leading environmental, program management and design firm, as ranked by Engineering News-Record and named a leader in sustainability consulting by Verdantix. Visit www.ch2mhill.com.