THE HANFORD SITE

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Hanford Laboratory Gas Systems Ready for Treating Tank Waste

RICHLAND, Wash. – Chemists inside the Analytical Laboratory at the Hanford Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant have finished testing high-purity gas systems that will help technicians analyze incoming samples and determine the correct glass-forming recipe for treating low-activity waste.

“The operational transition to start treating tank waste is the sum of many parts,” said Jason Young, the plant’s commissioning manager for the Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of River Protection. “Getting the high-purity gas systems in the lab commissioned and ready for operations is a critical part of preparing to start treating tank waste.”

The lab’s gas systems include helium, argon, nitrogen, and methane. During future plant operations, lab technicians will use these gases, along with scientific equipment, to characterize metals and organic materials in samples of low-activity waste.

The Analytical Laboratory is key to the Direct-Feed Low-Activity Waste (DFLAW) approach that will be used to treat millions of gallons of waste from Hanford’s underground storage tanks. DFLAW is a system of facilities operating together to vitrify, or turn into glass, low-activity waste. Moving these facilities from construction to commissioning is one of DOE's priorities for 2020.

“This is a big accomplishment,” said Ross Hamlett, commissioning manager with Waste Treatment Completion Company, a subcontractor to project lead Bechtel National Inc. “It was a tremendous effort by the entire team to finish the onsite testing in hot weather while implementing COVID-19 safety controls and coordinating with employees who are teleworking.”

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The Department of Energy (DOE) is engaged in one of the great public works of this century at the Hanford Site near Richland, Washington. Responsible for the federal government’s cleanup of the legacy of more than 40 years of producing plutonium through the 1980s, DOE is transforming the site back into a 24/7 operations mode to treat tank waste from the production era. The DOE Office of River Protection (ORP) is responsible for the safe and efficient retrieval, treatment and disposal of the 56 million gallons of chemical and radioactive waste stored in Hanford’s 177 underground tanks. The mission includes building and commissioning the world’s largest radioactive waste treatment plant, which will immobilize the legacy tank waste through vitrification. The DOE Richland Operations Office is responsible for all remaining Hanford cleanup and is currently focused on stabilizing and demolishing former plutonium production structures, excavating and disposing of contaminated soil and waste, treating contaminated groundwater, and configuring Hanford Site infrastructure for the future, with an emphasis on supporting the tank waste mission. Hanford Site work is conducted by a federal and contractor workforce of approximately 9,400 personnel. Visit www.hanford.gov for more information about the Hanford Site.

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