THE HANFORD SITE

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Media Contacts:
Rob Roxburgh, Central Plateau Cleanup Company, (509) 438-1216, robert_t_roxburgh@rl.gov
Ed Dawson, DOE, (509) 376-1475, edward_m_dawson@orp.doe.gov

Metamorphosis: 'Cocooning' Complete for Seventh Hanford Reactor Building

Workers with Hanford Site contractor Central Plateau Cleanup Company recently completed construction of a protective enclosure, or cocoon, over the former K East Reactor building. The cocoon is designed to protect the reactor building while the radioactivity in the deactivated reactor core decays over the next several decades, making it safer to complete disposition of the reactor in the future.

RICHLAND, Wash. – Just over a year after breaking ground, crews recently completed construction of a protective enclosure, or “cocoon,” around another former plutonium production reactor at the Hanford Site, leaving only one more to go.

This EM 2022 priority, completed ahead of schedule and under budget, marks a significant accomplishment in the Department of Energy's risk-reduction cleanup mission along the Columbia River.

One of DOE's key construction priorities for 2022, the huge steel structure is more than 120 feet tall and 150 feet wide. The interim safe storage structure will protect the K East Reactor building while the radioactivity in the deactivated reactor core decays over the next several decades, making it safer to complete disposition of the reactor in the future.

"Our One Hanford team continues to deliver taxpayer value by safely completing projects that reduce risks to our workforce, our community, the Columbia River and the environment of the Pacific Northwest," said Brian Vance, manager of the DOE Office of River Protection and Richland Operations Office. "With this achievement and the exceptional accomplishments over the last few years, I am very optimistic about the Hanford Site's future."

NEW VIDEO ALERT: *Watch this time-lapse video on construction of a steel structure over the former K East Reactor building. Hanford Site crews have finished building the protective enclosure, or cocoon, around the former plutonium production reactor, achieving an EM 2022 priority.*

Workers with Hanford Site contractor Central Plateau Cleanup Company (CPCCo) broke ground on the project last fall after awarding a subcontract to a local business for the work in August 2021.

Earlier this year, crews finished backfilling and compacting the area around the former reactor with approximately 34,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel to level the site before pouring a 6-foot-thick concrete foundation to support construction of the cocoon. The first steel columns for the enclosure

were placed in mid-May with construction of the frame and installation of metal sheeting on the walls and roof continuing through the summer.

The cocoon's design allows for routine inspections of the reactor every five years. During this "checkup," radiation technicians will confirm that no contamination is leaving the sealed reactor core, and that nothing is entering the building from the outside. Additional safety features include new lighting between the structure and the reactor building, as well as upgraded lighting inside the building.

"I'm very proud of our team's performance on this complex project," said John Eschenberg, CPCCo president. "So many different skillsets were needed to successfully complete this work. From laborers to trades and crafts to the support of the Department and our regulators, it was a true collaborative effort, and we did it all with a spotless safety record."

The K East Reactor operated from 1955 to 1971 and is the seventh of Hanford's nine former reactors to be cocooned. The nearby K West Reactor will be the eighth. The ninth, the B Reactor, has been preserved as the world's first full-scale plutonium production reactor and is part of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. Hanford's other six reactors were cocooned between 1998 and 2012.

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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 10,000 personnel. Visit www.hanford.gov for more information about the Hanford Site.

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