U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

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Radioactive Equipment Cleared From U Canyon Deck

Recovery Act Funding Moves U Canyon Closer to First-of-a-Kind Demolition

RICHLAND, WASH. – Using $35 million in additional funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is preparing one of Hanford's massive re-processing canyons – the 810-foot-long U Canyon – for demolition.

DOE's Central Plateau contactor, CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company (CH2M HILL), completed removal of more than 120 large radioactive pieces of equipment from the deck of U Canyon this week. The canyon is one of five former nuclear fuel-reprocessing plants at the Hanford Site in southeast Washington State.

"U Canyon will be a model for the demolition of other canyons on the Hanford Site," said Al Farabee, DOE Federal Project Director. "Thanks to Recovery Act funding, we were able to take on this first-of-a-kind demolition. U Canyon is now ready for its next phase."

The next step for U Canyon is to grout the lower levels of the canyon cells. About 20,000 cubic yards of grout will be placed inside the canyon cells and supporting galleries, rooms, tunnels and piping. Finally, the upper section of the canyon will be demolished prior to placing the structure under an engineered cap.

The total cost for the preparation work is $52 million, which includes $35 million in Recovery Act funds.

"Our workers safely accelerated the schedule of this work," said Kurt Kehler, CH2M HILL decommissioning and demolition vice president. "They've broken new territory here at Hanford and found efficiencies that not only reduce hazards but also put us one step closer in the process to meet DOE's goal to have the canyon prepared for demolition by 2012."

Located in Hanford's 200 West Area, the 221-U Canyon is the centerpiece of U Plant. The 810-foot long canyon is 70-feet wide, 80-feet high, and extends 30 feet below the surface. The walls of the plant are anywhere from three to nine feet thick. Chemical tanks and smaller support, or ancillary facilities made up the balance of the plant's infrastructure.

Cleanup of U Plant has already included demolishing large chemical tanks and ancillary facilities near the canyon building; removing some waste for disposition; and moving the contaminated equipment on the canyon deck into lower levels of the plant, into openings called cells. Any void spaces, including the cells, internal vessel spaces, and other areas of the canyon will be filled with grout.

"One of the challenges crews faced to complete this major step included using the same crane that was used back in the 50s to lift the cover blocks and place excess equipment and materials into the concrete cells beneath the canyon deck," said Kehler. "It was an efficiency that saved taxpayer money and project schedule."

Until 1952, U Plant was used for training operators of two other chemical processing facilities, T Plant and B Plant. In 1952, the facility was converted to recover uranium from waste generated by the other plants. Through 1964, U Plant was used to receive, decontaminate, maintain, and store equipment from other Hanford Site processing facilities.

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