

DOE NEWS

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6,000th DRUM OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE RETRIEVED

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has met a critical milestone with the retrieval of more than 1,200 cubic meters (about 6,000 drums) of buried waste from Hanford's low-level burial grounds. Contractor Fluor Hanford began the work in October 2003 and finished four months ahead of the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) milestone date of December 2004. The TPA, signed by DOE, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the State of Washington Department of Ecology, ultimately calls for all contact handled buried waste of this type (about 15,000 cubic meters, or roughly 75,000 drum-equivalents) to be retrieved by 2010.

The drums contain low level waste, "mixed" low-level waste (which contains hazardous chemicals) and transuranic (TRU) waste in the form of contaminated debris, tools, clothing, and other materials generated in the 1970s and 1980s. The boxes and drums of waste were stacked on asphalt pads, covered with plywood, draped with tarps, and then covered with dirt.

To ensure the safety of workers, crews follow a methodical retrieval process. As the drums are pulled one-by-one from the stack, each is visually inspected for corrosion, dents, or bulges, and comprehensive storage records are reviewed to help determine what kind of waste is in the containers. Low level and mixed low-level waste are disposed of in lined Hanford facilities. TRU waste is shipped offsite to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico for disposal. Approximately half the drums retrieved have contained TRU waste.

“This is critical risk reduction work being done ahead of schedule,” said Keith A. Klein, Manager of the DOE’s Richland Operations Office. “Pulling these containers out of the trenches eliminates the threat they pose to the surrounding environment and will enable us to continue ramping up the amount of transuranic waste we send off the Hanford Site to WIPP for permanent disposal.”

"I'm very proud of the Fluor Hanford employees who have achieved this milestone," said Ron Gallagher, Fluor Hanford president and chief executive officer. "Employees were encouraged to develop faster, cheaper ways to safely retrieve the waste. Their success and determination are the reasons we are so far ahead of schedule. All of this was achieved safely, while encountering increasingly more degraded drums, difficult weather conditions, and technical challenges in waste processing.”

“The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is pleased with the progress DOE has made to date in removing waste from Hanford’s burial grounds,” said Nick Ceto, Hanford Program Manager for EPA. “Retrieval of this waste from unlined trenches and processing of the transuranic portion for off-site disposal at WIPP clearly demonstrates DOE's commitment to Hanford cleanup.”

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