

DOE NEWS

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TPA MILESTONE COMPLETED FOUR MONTHS EARLY; CLEAN-UP MOVING FORWARD ON ADDITIONAL SITES

RICHLAND, Wash. – Department of Energy contractor Washington Closure Hanford has recently cleaned-up and closed three Hanford burial grounds, completing a Tri-Party Agreement milestone more than four months early.

The TPA milestone called for completing work at three “high environmental priority” sites by April 30, 2007. The selected sites were 618-2, 618-3 and 618-5 burial grounds. All are located about one mile north of the Richland city limit and only a few hundred yards from the Columbia River. The milestone also called for workers to characterize two smaller burial sites (300-7 & 9) in preparation for future cleanup.

“Completing clean up and closure of these burial grounds is an important step in furthering clean up of the River Corridor,” said DOE Project Director Kevin Bazzell. “We’re now shifting our focus toward clean-up of additional burial sites, specifically the 618-7 site.”

Work began on the 618-2 Burial Ground in November 2004 but was suspended in December 2004 after a safe containing gram-quantities of plutonium was discovered, as well as higher-than-anticipated levels of plutonium-contaminated waste.

“We learned to expect the unexpected at 618-2,” said John W. Darby, manager Washington Closure Hanford’s 300 Area field remediation work. Washington Closure Hanford manages the River Corridor Closure Project at the 586-square-mile Hanford Site for the U.S. Department of Energy’s Richland Operations Office.

“We conduct extensive literature reviews and personnel interviews to get an idea of what might be in the burial grounds,” Darby said. “But records and memories are often incomplete – even more so as time goes by,” he said.

“We learned that we had to plan for the worst case, which in this case was to plan to encounter plutonium-contaminated waste at certain burial grounds. We also introduced some new waste-material sorting techniques that helped reduce the potential for worker exposure to contaminated materials,” said Darby.

The team also developed new methods and procedures for handling the safe. Workers moved the safe into a containment tent and then placed it in a specially fabricated glovebag to remove the liquid contents.

After the liquids were removed, the safe was packaged in a steel waste box for future shipment to the Waste Isolation Plant in Carlsbad, New Mexico, for disposal. The liquids removed from the safe are believed to have historical significance because they represent some of the first plutonium produced at Hanford.

Work resumed at the site in December 2005. The balance of material removed from the burial ground was typical of other Hanford burial grounds in that it contained contaminated equipment, shielded casks, building materials and laboratory wastes. The site also contained drummed oil, metal crucibles, laboratory glassware, automotive batteries, as well as items containing lead and asbestos.

In all, more than 126,000 tons of contaminated material was removed from the three burial grounds and sent to the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility located in the 200 Area. Workers completed revegetation at 618-2 and 3 in mid-December 2006. The 618-5 Burial Ground was backfilled and revegetated in early 2004. Confirmatory sampling of 300-7 & 9 was completed last summer and the sites have been designated for cleanup within the next two years.

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