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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND FLUOR HANFORD, INC. COMPLETE PLUTONIUM WORK

ONE MONTH AHEAD OF MILESTONE

The Nuclear Material Stabilization Project at Hanford's Plutonium Finishing Plant (PFP) has finished repackaging the last of a material called Rocky Flats ash for ultimate shipment from Hanford to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico. This is approximately one month ahead of the April 30, 2001 Tri-Party Agreement milestone.

The repackaged material will be stored on an interim basis at the Central Waste Complex in Hanford's 200 West Area until it is shipped to WIPP. The ash was generated at the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Rocky Flats site where incineration was used to recover plutonium from process residues. At one time PFP also had an operation similar to Rocky Flats that generated ash.

"Completion of the Rocky Flats ash brings us another step closer to completing stabilization and processing of all the plutonium at PFP by May 2004," said Pete Knollmeyer, DOE Richland Operations Office Assistant Manager of Nuclear Materials Stabilization.

"Preparing these and other plutonium materials for safe storage and shipment to offsite disposal is an important element in the plan to clean up the Central Plateau where Hanford's former weapons production facilities are located," said George Jackson, Fluor Hanford, Inc. Vice President for the Nuclear Material Stabilization Project.

PFP's inventory includes nearly 18 metric tons of plutonium bearing metals, oxide powders, solutions, polycubes and residues. The bulk of the plutonium bearing residues -- like Rocky Flats ash -- will be packaged in Pipe Overpack Containers. This technique reduces volume, eliminates unnecessary processing and minimizes the radiation dose to workers.

The residues are removed from the storage vault, visually inspected to verify they meet WIPP acceptance criteria and then prepared for shipment. The residues are packed into slip lid cans that are loaded into a pipe overpack container that provides correct spacing and protection for transuranic waste. The overpack container is then shipped to the Central Waste Complex to await shipment to WIPP.

Knollmeyer praised the workers and management at PFP for their safe and rapid completion of this Tri-Party Agreement milestone. Knollmeyer also thanked the Washington State Department of Ecology for their quick support in approving and permitting the process.

Now that repackaging of the Rocky Flats ash is complete, the team is preparing to begin work on the next residues category, Hanford ash.

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Historical Note: The U.S. Department of Energy's Richland Operations Office manages the Hanford Site in southeastern Washington State. Hanford was established during World War II as part of the top secret Manhattan Project to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. Weapons material production was halted in the late 1980s. The Hanford Site is now engaged in the world's largest cleanup effort to deal with the legacy of radioactive and hazardous wastes that resulted from the plutonium production era. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington State Department of Ecology regulate Hanford's cleanup program under a long-term compliance contract called the Tri-Party Agreement. This agreement sets the framework and timelines on the cleanup work so that Hanford meets environmental standards. Hanford cleanup is focused on three outcomes: restoring the Columbia River Corridor for other uses, transitioning the Central Plateau to long term waste treatment and storage, and preparing for the future.

[Hanford Home Page] [Press Index]

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