



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

MEDIA CONTACT:
Geoff Tyree, DOE, (509) 376-4171
geoff_tyree@rl.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 24, 2008

HANFORD'S K-EAST BASIN COMING DOWN

Open-air demolition of building key step in River Corridor cleanup

The U.S. Department of Energy and contractor Fluor Hanford have started demolishing the K East Basin, once a key nuclear facility located about 400 yards from the Columbia River at the Hanford Site in southeast Washington State.

Workers in protective clothing and respirators are using an excavator and shear to tear down the basin's ceiling and walls – its superstructure. As the structure is being torn down, dust and contamination are being suppressed by a fine water mist being sprayed over the work area by fog cannons and fire hoses. Demolition of the superstructure is expected to be completed by the end of September, and then workers will turn their efforts to the concrete basin itself.

“Tearing down this nuclear facility is a key step in our cleanup progress along the Columbia River,” said Dave Brockman, Manager of the Department of Energy’s Richland Operations Office. “Removing the basin is critical to getting to the contaminated soil underneath the basin as soon as possible.”

The million-gallon, concrete basin once held more than 1,100 tons of uranium metal fuel rods, known as spent nuclear fuel, as well as radioactive sludge, a byproduct of

fuel corrosion during years of storage. Water provided shielding from the highly radioactive materials while they were in the basin. Leaks of contaminated water from the basin were recorded in the 1970s and the 1990s.

Workers finished removing the spent fuel from the basin in 2004 and the radioactive sludge in 2007. Water was drained from the basin earlier this year. In March, the basin was filled with 5,100 cubic yards of sand mixed with grout. The sand not only provides shielding from radioactivity in the basin's concrete walls, but also is a platform for the heavy machinery that is now demolishing the basin's superstructure.

"We've overcome tremendous obstacles to get to this point at the K Basins," said Fluor Hanford President Con Murphy. "Now, it's exciting to see the building coming down as planned and know that we're making progress in eliminating another potential risk at Hanford."

"By 2015, EPA expects that the vast majority of Hanford cleanup work along the river will be completed," said Nick Ceto Program Manager for the Environmental Protection Agency's Hanford Project Office. "The work ongoing today at the K-Reactor complex supports that important goal."

###

RL-08-0017