

Hanford Spent Fuel Problem on Fast-Track to Resolution

RICHLAND, Wash., March 6, 1996 -- The U.S. Department of Energy earlier this week released the Record of Decision (ROD) on the environmental impact of moving 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel from water-filled concrete basins near the Columbia River to a new dry canister storage facility near the center of the Hanford Site. The ROD puts the DOE and Hanford contractors only a step away from full-scale construction of the Canister Storage Building in which the spent fuel will be safely managed and stored.

A Record of Decision is the final step in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process and is issued following public comment on the draft EIS and publication of the final EIS. The ROD authorizes implementation of the final EIS preferred alternative.

The Canister Storage Building was part of the Hanford Waste Vitrification Plant project which was halted in 1993. In late January, David A. Mowat Construction Company of Kirkland, Washington, was awarded a \$4.19 million dollar contract to finish construction of the facility substructure which is about 10 percent complete. Completing the existing structure as opposed to building a new building from scratch will cut one year off the spent fuel project schedule and save the taxpayer about \$17 million.

Although the contractor cannot begin full scale construction until final design approval is granted, expected later this month, the Mowat Co. has been proceeding with site mobilization and setting up its construction facilities. When the Canister Storage Building is completed in October 1997, the corroding spent nuclear fuel will be removed from the 40-year-old K Basins and transferred to the new facility. The DOE expects to begin moving fuel out of the basins beginning in December 1997.

The final EIS evaluated potential impacts of alternative ways to provide for safe interim storage and management of the spent nuclear fuel inventory at Hanford.

The preferred alternative is to remove the spent nuclear fuel from the K Basins, prepare the fuel, seal the fuel rods in canisters filled with an inert gas atmosphere, and provide for safe interim storage for up to 40 years.

The ROD is being distributed to interested members of the public, and federal and state agencies. It is available for viewing at the DOE Public Reading Room at 100 Sprout Road, Room 130W, Richland, as well as information repositories located in Washington and Oregon.

Copies of the ROD are available by contacting:

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