

DOE to Transfer FFTF Visitors Center to Port of Benton

In a move that will help ensure a new home for the former Hanford museum, the U.S. Department of Energy's Richland Operations Office (RL) is transferring the Fast Flux Test Facility's (FFTF) Visitors Center to the Port of Benton. The Port will then sell the 3,360-square-foot modular facility to the City of Richland. In keeping with its original purpose, the building will be used as a public museum featuring the history and technological accomplishments of the Columbia Basin.

Richland City Manager Joe King said, "This is truly a win/win for everyone. It is especially important for the community because it retains a museum that showcases the colorful heritage and history of the Mid-Columbia. This expanded museum will add to the quality of life in the Tri-Cities, and is another tool to spur tourism in our community."

Today's ceremony marks the official transfer of the first major piece of property to change ownership under the Hanford Excess Personal Property program. Personal property refers to portable federal property such as computers, modular facilities, and cars. The program is designed to help support economic development in the Tri-Cities by turning excess DOE personal property over to local organizations.

The Port of Benton and RL have worked closely with the City of Richland to organize the transfer of the 401 facility. An agreement on the facility's new use was signed between the City of Richland and the Environmental Science and Technology Foundation (ESTF) in December 1995. Under the agreement, ESTF is responsible for the disassembly, transportation, and redesign of the modules in collaboration with volunteer local businesses. The City of Richland is providing land behind the Community Center on George Washington Way and some site preparation and startup costs.

John D. Wagoner, Manager of DOE's Richland Operations Office, said, "We are very pleased to work with our local government agencies to transfer the 401 facility. This helps us achieve several key goals: we help privatize the museum; we avoid storage and possible demolition costs; and we support the community's economic transition goals."

The transfer program is administered by the Port of Benton, in conjunction with contractual agreements established in the Personal Property Transfer Program Implementation Plan and the Memorandum of Understanding. The Port of Benton, DOE, and TRIDEC signed both documents in November 1995. Under this program, Hanford's excess personal property can be made available at below market cost to local businesses that qualify.

Port Commissioner Bob Larson said, "The Port of Benton is very excited about completing this first major transfer under DOE's Personal Property Transfer program. This is a wonderful example of community spirit working for economic development in the Tri-Cities."

The first step toward transferring the building to local control began in April 1995, when the Visitors Center was identified as excess property. The City of Richland submitted a letter to DOE requesting use of the facility as a future home for the Hanford museum which is slated to move from the present Federal Building location. DOE officials were authorized to transfer this facility under a provision of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1994. The law authorizes the Secretary of Energy to transfer excess personal property to mitigate adverse economic impacts from the closure of a DOE facility. This led to the establishment of the Hanford Personal Property Transfer program. The program streamlines the process of transferring excess Hanford personal property to the local community.

"This is a great day for Hanford and all Tri-Citians. With this process in place, I am confident that future transfers will be done even faster to speed economic transition," said Wagoner.

The Center was originally a tour stop for briefings on the FFTF, a state-of-the-art test reactor. It housed an extensive model of FFTF and showed all of the reactor's major safety systems. It also displayed a model of the huge fuel assemblies that powered the reactor. Thousands of visitors have toured the 401 facility from May 1977 until it closed in September 1994.

The ESTF, an independent, non-profit corporation, took over operation of the former Hanford museum on January 1, 1996. The ESTF is expanding and renaming the museum the Columbia River Exhibition of History, Science and Technology.

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For more information contact:

Keith V. Taylor (509) 376-2282 (DOE)
Diane Jordan (509) 375-3060 (Port)
Todd Nelson (509) 946-1594 (City)
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