

# DOE NEWS

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**HANFORD PLUTONIUM INVENTORY NOW SAFE, STABLE**  
*Remaining Cold War inventory ready for shipment out of Washington State*

Beating by more than three months a commitment to the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB), the last of approximately 18 metric tons of plutonium-bearing material at Hanford has been safely stabilized and packaged for shipment off site.

A producer of plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons arsenal from the 1940s to the late 1980s, Hanford manufactured tens of thousands of hockey-puck-sized plutonium metal buttons for shipment to weapons fabrication facilities.

"The final remnants of the Cold War are now in safe and stable condition," said Keith A. Klein, manager of the DOE's Richland Operations Office. "As a result, our workers are safer. Our environment is safer. And we are doing our part to make this nation safer, too, by meeting the President's goals for the nonproliferation and consolidation of nuclear materials."

The Plutonium Finishing Plant, where plutonium solutions were purified and converted to a more stable metal form, was the final step in the site's production process. When Hanford's last reactor was shut down in 1988 and the cleanup mission began in 1989, both weapons-grade plutonium and large quantities of plutonium-bearing material in various forms were left inside the plant's process lines and glove boxes. By the mid-1990s, the Plutonium Finishing Plant complex, a collection of 61 buildings, posed the Hanford Site's greatest plutonium hazard.

In July 2002 contractor Fluor Hanford Inc. finished stabilizing 4,300 liters of plutonium nitrate solutions, and in August 2003 completed the packaging of more than 6,000 pounds of plutonium residues for disposal. The final work involved stabilizing and packaging the last of several tons of solid plutonium materials, including small plutonium-injected cubes used in lab tests and plutonium-laced powders.

“Fluor Hanford used state-of-the-art technologies to safely convert the inventory of plutonium solutions, residues and solids into more stable forms and prepare the materials for shipment off the Hanford Site,” said Ron Gallagher, Fluor Hanford president and chief executive officer.

“This accomplishment marks the end of 15 years of an intense cleanup program and the start of our effort to shift the facility’s 600 employees to decontamination and decommissioning work.”

The Plutonium Finishing Plant has been among the most expensive at Hanford to maintain because of the nature, amount, and variety of the radioactive material stored in the buildings; their age and size; and the safeguards and security required.

Over the next few years, the facility’s buildings will be closed and decommissioned. Original plans called for completing cleanup of the Plutonium Finishing Plant complex by 2038, but DOE and Fluor Hanford are working to accelerate that work to 2009.

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