

DOE NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

July 1, 2004

FIRST OF TWO HANFORD BASINS EMPTIED OF SPENT NUCLEAR FUEL (SNF) CANISTERS

Crews at the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Hanford Site have finished moving the last canister of SNF out of the K East Reactor basin, one of two such basins located just 400 yards from the Columbia River. The K East basin had held about 1,150 metric tons of fuel; together the two basins held about 2,106 metric tons.

"Emptying this basin is more than just a project milestone -- it's a critical step in risk reduction at Hanford," said Keith Klein, Manager of the DOE Richland Operations Office. "This basin has leaked twice before. Moving the approximately two million pounds of fuel is the first step in emptying the basin altogether so that it no longer presents a risk to the environment."

The K East fuel was moved to the nearby K West basin, where it was washed and loaded into large containers. Water is removed from the containers in a separate facility; the canisters are backfilled with inert helium gas and are taken to Hanford's Canister Storage Building on the Central Plateau. Ultimately, the packaged spent fuel will be sent offsite to a national geologic repository.

"Getting the fuel out of K East was difficult work," said Ron Gallagher, president and chief executive officer of contractor Fluor Hanford. "Most of the fuel was badly corroded, and some of the fuel was literally falling apart as we retrieved it. Now that the fuel canisters are out, we can turn our focus to getting the K East Basin ready for demolition."

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Fluor Hanford expects to finish loading the final 200 metric tons of spent fuel in the K West Basin into containers later this summer. Crews are now removing about 42 cubic meters of radioactive sludge at the bottom of the K East basin – the result of dirt and sand blowing into the basin, concrete particles from the basin walls and floor, and the degradation of the fuel over the decades. A Tri-Party (cleanup) Agreement milestone calls for all sludge to be out of K East by February 2006 and the basin demolished by April 2007.

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RL-04-0025