

The logo for DOE NEWS. The letters 'DOE' are significantly larger than 'NEWS'. Both are in a bold, blue, serif font. The text is positioned over a background of horizontal blue lines.

DOE NEWS

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K BASINS WATER REMOVAL BEGINS

Partial drain of K East Basin water beats regulatory milestone

Crews at the Hanford Site have begun removing water from the K East reactor basin, which until recently had been home to more than a thousand tons of spent nuclear fuel, and in the 1970s and 1990s leaked several million gallons of water into the surrounding soil.

The K East and K West Basins are located about 400 yards from the Columbia River. Holding 1.2 million gallons of water each, they have provided underwater storage since the 1970s for 2,300 tons of degrading spent nuclear fuel. Contractor Fluor Hanford moved the last canister of spent fuel out of the K East Basin in July and expects to complete removal of all fuel from the K West Basin in the next few weeks.

Over the past month, Fluor crews have been pouring a cement mixture into a section of the K East Basin known as the discharge chute. During production years, the chute was the conduit for moving fuel from the K East Reactor into the basin for underwater storage. The area where the discharge chute connects to the reactor is also the point from which several million gallons of contaminated water leaked in the 1970s and the 1990s. Crews began permanently removing water in early August to support the first cement placement on August 22. A total of about 500 cubic yards of cement have been poured into the discharge chute, resulting in the removal of about 105,000 gallons of water. The water is transported by truck to a permitted facility on the Hanford Site and treated to regulatory standards.

The Tri-Party Agreement, signed by DOE, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Washington State Department of Ecology, called for initiating water removal from the K East Basin by Sept. 30, 2004.

“This is another example of early risk reduction at Hanford,” said Matt McCormick, DOE Richland Assistant Manager for the Central Plateau. “With the fuel out of K East, we’re going after both the sludge and the water to close the basin altogether – an important step for this project and Hanford cleanup.”

“The K Basins have posed a significant risk to the Columbia River,” said Ron Gallagher, president and CEO of Fluor Hanford. “As we remove the last of the spent fuel, we are now turning our attention to closing these facilities. Retrieving the residual nuclear material—the radioactive sludge—then removing the water and the basins themselves, and finally cleaning up the contaminated soil under the basins will completely eliminate that risk.”

Plans call for retrieving approximately 65 cubic yards of radioactive sludge from both water-filled basins and removing a highly contaminated layer of the basins' internal concrete walls. Crews will then remove water as cement is gradually poured into the basins. At the end, plans call for cutting the cement-filled basins into sections, disposing of approximately 12,000 tons of contaminated material, and removing contaminated soil underneath the basins. Milestones in the Tri-Party Agreement call for removing the K East Basin by April 2007 and the K West Basin by April 2009.

“Replacing the water in the discharge chute with cement provides a solid dam between the remaining water in the basin and a construction joint that has leaked over 15 million gallons of contaminated water,” said Larry Gadbois, K Basins Project Manager for the EPA. “This concrete also plugs a large opening to the reactor core, thereby providing a solid barrier between the core and the outside environment. Not only does this help protect the groundwater and the air, it is also required to finish the task of cleanout of the basin and preparation of the reactor for safe, long-term storage. All that protection...cleanup progress...and the workers did a great job.”

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