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Energy Secretary Abraham Says Rocky Flats Weapons Complex Is Now Free Of Nuclear Weapons Usable Material

All Nuclear Weapons Material Leaves Site Ensuring Environmental Restoration By 2006

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham announced today that the Department of Energy has completed a major cleanup milestone of its Rocky Flats weapons facility, located near Denver, Colorado, marking the departure of the final shipment of nuclear weapons-usable material from the site.

“Rocky Flats helped the United States win the Cold War and it is no longer in the nuclear weapons business,” Abraham said. “Rocky Flats is on a path to close under budget. The hard work of all those involved in the Rocky Flats cleanup has helped beat target dates for key milestones, and maintained the commitment to the American people of this country to shutdown and cleanup this facility. This removal of the weapons-usable material is a historic event, demonstrating what can be accomplished when DOE and its host communities work together.”

Ambassador Linton Brooks, administrator of the DOE’s National Nuclear Security Administration, was on-hand to represent the Energy Department at the event. The NNSA played a key roll in ensuring that the critical nuclear weapons material was removed from Rocky Flats safely and securely.

The historic occasion marks the end of the Rocky Flats facility as one of the preeminent nuclear weapons fabrication facilities for the United States. Because of Rocky Flats mission to produce nuclear weapons, several of the facilities were once considered the country’s most dangerous places to work. President George H.W. Bush targeted the Rocky Flats facility for shutdown in 1992. In the mid-1990s, the goal was set to remove bomb-making material from the site by 2015. The site is now scheduled to be cleaned and closed in 2006.

The removal of the weapons-usable material at the site, a full 12 years ahead of schedule, reduces one of the greatest risks to human, health, and the environment. The material will be turned into fuel for nuclear reactors, thereby meeting a key nonproliferation goal of the United States.

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“This accomplishment is probably the most important milestone of the Rocky Flats Closure Project to date,” said Department of Energy Rocky Flats Site Manager Gene Schmitt. “It also saves close to \$2 million in security costs each month that can be applied directly to accomplishing more cleanup work.”

“With the plutonium removed from Rocky Flats, we will focus our resources on the final demolition of the site,” said Kaiser-Hill President and CEO Alan Parker, the company in charge of the environmental cleanup operation. “This accomplishment will enable easier access to the former production buildings allowing faster and safer cleanup.”

The Rocky Flats weapons plant was responsible for the fabrication of all the plutonium triggers currently at use in the nation’s nuclear stockpile.

Early forecasts estimated that it would take more than 60 years and \$37 billion dollars to complete a cleanup and closure that is now on track to be finished in 2006, at a total cost of approximately \$7 billion thereby saving the taxpayers nearly \$30 billion dollars.

When Rocky Flats was designated for closure, a daunting task was the removal of more than 12 metric tons of plutonium, the demolition of hundreds of aging and contaminated buildings, and the disposal of thousands of tons of radioactive and hazardous waste materials. To date, the closure project is more than halfway done.

Rocky Flats operated for more than 40 years. When cleanup work is complete, the site will become a National Wildlife Refuge under the management of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.