



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
ENERGY

**Richland Operations
Office**

DOE News Release

Media Contact:

Geoff Tyree, DOE

(509) 376-4171, Geoffrey.Tyree@rl.doe.gov

Dee Millikin, CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company

(509) 376-1297, Dee_Millikin@rl.gov

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Demolition Begins on Hanford's Historic Plutonium Vaults
Plutonium Finishing Plant on track to meet regulatory milestone

RICHLAND, WASH. – The [U.S. Department of Energy](http://www.doe.gov) (DOE) and contractor [CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company](http://www.ch2mhill.com) (CH2M HILL) began demolishing a vault complex that once held stores of plutonium for the U.S. nuclear weapons program at the Hanford Site in southeast Washington State.

The vault complex is part of Hanford's Plutonium Finishing Plant, which once consisted of more than 60 facilities. The plant produced nearly two-thirds of the nation's supply of plutonium during the Cold War.

"Cleaning out and demolishing these structures is a key element of DOE's vision for completing several major cleanup projects by 2015, and the work keeps us on track to meet a major regulatory milestone to demolish the Plutonium Finishing Plant complex by 2016," said J.D. Dowell, Assistant Manager for the Central Plateau, DOE Richland Operations Office.

Crews began demolishing smaller support structures at the vault complex this week and will then demolish two contaminated facilities that once stored plutonium destined for other DOE sites that produced nuclear weapons during the Cold War.

"We're starting with the smaller facilities first. After Thanksgiving, we'll start demolishing the contaminated facilities, and we expect to finish soon after the New Year," said Kurt Kehler, CH2M HILL Decommissioning and Demolition Project vice president.

The vault complex includes more than 20,000 square feet of facilities. Prior to starting demolition activities, crews decontaminated and decommissioned the facilities. Preparations included removing contaminated equipment from the buildings. Crews cleaned out and removed large, sealed containers, called glove boxes, that allowed plant employees to handle nuclear materials safely when the plant was operating.

The Plutonium Finishing Plant was the final step at the Hanford Site in producing plutonium used in the U.S. nuclear weapons program during the Cold War. Other facilities on the Hanford

Site fabricated, irradiated and processed more than 20 million pieces of baton-shaped uranium fuel pieces, called slugs. Plutonium liquids were sent to the Plutonium Finishing Plant, where workers used chemical processing and furnaces to fabricate plutonium metal, primarily hockey puck-shaped pieces called buttons.

The plutonium buttons were stored in high-security vaults in the plant until they were shipped to sites that formed the metal into pieces that went into nuclear weapons. Plutonium stored at the plant was shipped to another DOE site to allow DOE and its contractor to clean up and demolish the plant. The last shipment was made in 2009.

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