



PLUTONIUM VAULT COMPLEX DEMOLITION

The U.S. Department of Energy and contractor CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company completed demolition of a plutonium vault complex that was formerly one of the highest security facilities at the Hanford Site in southeast Washington State.



The vault complex was part of Hanford's Plutonium Finishing Plant, which produced nearly two-thirds of the nation's supply of plutonium used in the nuclear weapons program during the Cold War. Built in 1971, the vault complex held the top-secret stores of plutonium in metal canisters until they were shipped for weapons production.

CH2M HILL emptied the vault of its inventory in November 2009, marking a monumental shift in the plant's security. With the special nuclear material shipped to an offsite location, the layers of security could be removed including metal detectors, inspection stations, razor wire and concrete barriers.

The vault complex comprised six structures and approximately 20,000 square feet. CH2M HILL began demolishing the vault complex in late 2011 following

months of preparation including removing large, highly contaminated pieces of equipment called gloveboxes that allowed workers to handle nuclear materials safely when the plant was operating.

As the last of the building debris is removed for disposal at Hanford's onsite engineered landfill, the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility, CH2M HILL will continue decommissioning the remainder of the Plutonium Finishing Plant, removing gloveboxes and other radiological and industrial hazards to prepare the plant for demolition by 2016.

Plutonium Finishing Plant

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 the high-security vault complex until they were shipped to sites that formed the metal into pieces that went into nuclear weapons.

For more information:

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