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EM Recovery News

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Crane Operators Expedite Recovery Act Work at Paducah Site

PADUCAH, Ky. – American Recovery and Reinvestment Act workers are pioneering the use of mobile cranes to overcome challenges in the cleanup of a contaminated Cold War complex at the Paducah Site.

Three certified crane operators hired through Recovery Act funding are using a newly purchased 65-ton crane and two smaller rented cranes to remove equipment from the C-410/420 Feed Plant. Nearly $18 million in additional Feed Plant cleanup is the result of cost savings from the September 2010 demolition of the C-746-A East End Smelter, which was completed a year ahead of schedule and $12 million under budget.

“This is the first time we’ve hired crane operators and operated mobile cranes inside a facility as part of the decontamination and decommissioning program at Paducah,” DOE Paducah Site Recovery Act Project Manager Rob Seifert said.

Highly skilled operators negotiate the cranes through parts of what once was a nine-facility complex spanning 200,000 square feet. They

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John Baker operates a 65-ton crane to remove old equipment and systems from the C-410 Feed Plant at the Paducah Site. This and two smaller cranes help expedite cleanup in what was a nine-facility complex spanning 200,000 square feet.

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Justin Coursey is among three certified crane operators hired with Recovery Act funding to prepare the Feed Plant for partial demolition this spring at the Paducah Site.

Workers Overcome Challenges, Pave the Way for Recovery Act Success

In this June issue, EM Recovery News focuses on the solutions workers in the U.S. Department of Energy Office of Environmental Management (EM) Recovery Act Program developed to overcome challenges in the $6 billion cleanup of the Manhattan Project and Cold War. EM Recovery News highlights creative and innovative strategies Recovery Act workers have used to move past obstacles as they clean up contaminated waste, decontaminate, decommission, and demolish facilities, and remediate soil and groundwater across the DOE complex. For example, the Paducah Site in Kentucky brought in mobile cranes for the first time to remove hard-to-reach equipment in a contaminated Cold War complex, a required step before the facility can be demolished. At Washington's Hanford Site, workers built a containment enclosure where they could prepare contaminated equipment for disposal without impacting surrounding work areas. Read about how workers in the EM Recovery Act Program achieved success in the face of adversity at these sites and many others in this 25th issue of EM Recovery News.

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A transuranic waste shipment travels on an approved shipping route to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

Savannah River Site Uses Creative Strategies in Recovery Act Projects

AIKEN, S.C. – Guiding a $1.6 billion Recovery Act cleanup to safe and successful completion posed complex challenges to the Savannah River Site (SRS).

But the skilled and experienced workforce at SRS has overcome those challenges by using innovative solutions. The strategies are helping SRS achieve Recovery Act goals that include reducing the footprint of the 310-square-mile site by 75 percent by September 2012 and disposing of the site's legacy transuranic (TRU) waste inventory by the end of 2012.

"Innovative technologies, teamwork, and continuous improvements have addressed obstacles and helped to solve problems now as well as those in the future," said Dr. David Moody, manager of the U.S. Department of Energy-Savannah River Operations Office.

Problem Solving Spurs Quicker Waste Disposal

Creative problem solving has been central to success at E Area, which is used for storage and waste disposal. Much of the Recovery Act work there involves the disposition of waste generated by deactivation activities.

Because of the Recovery Act's accelerated cleanup schedule for projects such as the decommissioning of the P and R reactors, SRS faced challenges of disposing a larger amount of waste than before 2009, when Recovery Act work began. Waste slated for disposal in E Area slit trenches was more than twice the record amount disposed there in 2004.

The traditional approach to meeting the growing demand would have been to double productivity and resource allocation, requiring the operation of two trenches simultaneously and doubling

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Top photo: The H Canyon box remediation team at the Savannah River Site.

Bottom left: A member of SRS's legacy transuranic waste repackaging team dismantles a glove box at H Canyon.

Bottom right: Members of SRS's legacy transuranic waste repackaging team faced challenges preparing a T-shaped glove box with a large section in the center and portions that resemble wings for repackaging and shipment to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico for safe, permanent disposal.

Recovery Act projects increased the amount of waste heading to E Area trenches at the Savannah River Site. The spike in waste for disposal encouraged the Solid Waste Operations and Engineering personnel at Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, the management and operations contractor at the site, to look at ways to increase productivity.

the need for manpower and equipment. This would have also doubled the cost of the effort.

Rain No Longer Means Delays

Rain postponed waste burial operations at the trenches due to safety concerns. However, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS), the management and operating contractor at SRS, developed solutions to improve productivity on days immediately after rain.

The solutions include:

- Adding crushed stone to the roadway to allow trucks to operate after rain.
- Scraping wet soil from the contamination area on the sides of the slit trench and placing it into the trench with other low-level waste.
- Spreading plastic over the approach area before rain.
- Digging a diversion system when a trench is excavated to prevent excessive water from collecting in the trench or the contaminated area.
- Alternating the work of dump trucks and bulldozers on each end of the 40-foot-long trenches. After a truck dumps about five loads near one end of the trench and leaves to work at the other end, a bulldozer will follow, pushing the waste into the trench. As dumping occurs at one end, a load is pushed into the trench at the other end, which increases efficiency.

Creativity Leads to Safe, Successful Transuranic Waste Cleanup

Recovery Act workers faced challenges in other projects as well. At H Canyon — the only operational nuclear chemical separations plant in the U.S. — the legacy transuranic waste repackaging team is reducing the size of the glove boxes containing transuranic waste and repackaging them for shipment to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico for safe, permanent disposal.

“Repackaging this waste took a lot of forethought and communication before and during the process,” said Rob Smith, SRNS H Canyon TRU manager. “None of the repackaging has been simple, but this was one of our most difficult tasks.”

The team safely overcame the challenge of dismantling a large steel container containing a glove box with the highest contamination levels the team had ever encountered.

The challenge involved determining how to dismantle the glove box in a way that required the least amount of cutting. The glove box was T-shaped with portions attached on each side that resembled wings. Members of the team removed those portions and cut the center section of the box in half. Then, they put the pieces of the glove box in glove bags, and reduced the size of those pieces inside the bags while being careful to prevent the plastic from puncturing. The open, cut edges of the glove bags were covered with tape. Strong, puncture-resistant knee pads and blankets were used to guard the team members’ arms and knees when leaning on the ground or when near sharp pieces of the glove box.

“The Recovery Act projects have provided an excellent setting for creative problem solving and the application of technology gleaned from our experience,” said Paul Hunt, the SRNS vice president of the Recovery Act portfolio. □

Recovery Act workers with DOE contractor Savannah River Remediation join veteran workers at the Savannah River Site in a safety briefing before completing upgrades to one of the site's 49 waste tanks.

Liquid Waste Cleanup Team Thoroughly Trained in Safety

AIKEN, S.C. – Ensuring safe performance in all projects is integral to the mission of Savannah River Remediation LLC (SRR), the liquid waste operations contractor at the Savannah River Site (SRS).

SRR thoroughly trained hundreds of new Recovery Act workers, including employees who had not previously worked at SRS or a nuclear site of any kind. Some new hires were unfamiliar with the stringent safety standards and work processes at SRS. At a peak in 2010, more than 600 workers were employed in Recovery Act projects undertaken by SRR.

SRR management devised a two-pronged approach to make safe performance key to success in SRR's Recovery Act projects. First, SRR management required new employees — regardless of their work assignments — to attend comprehensive safety training before reporting to work stations.

Second, new Recovery Act workers were placed in positions that paired them with veteran SRS workers familiar with the safety processes required in a high-hazard, liquid waste operating environment.

SRR's Recovery Act work to accelerate liquid waste processing and remediation of SRS's 49 waste tanks is nearing the homestretch. SRR maintains momentum to complete a total of 41 Recovery Act projects by the end of September 2011.

"SRR's Recovery Act team will finish Recovery Act work strong," SRR Program Manager Mark Schmitz said. "All involved — team members, project managers and senior staff — have successfully met the challenge of contributing safe work performance to successful Recovery Act work." □

Expecting the Unexpected: The Challenges of Excavating a Manhattan Project Waste Site

LOS ALAMOS, N.M. – When the nation's top scientists converged on Los Alamos in 1943, their mission was to create a weapon that would end World War II.

They accomplished that mission, but while they were working on it they generated a certain amount of waste, much of it radioactive. They disposed of the waste by burying it in trenches in a waste dump that became known as Material Disposal Area B (MDA-B), which was used from 1944 to 1948.

Nearly 70 years later, the Recovery Act invested $110 million in the MDA-B excavation inside sturdy metal structures. One of the challenges faced by the team was that almost no records existed about what might be buried there.

"We did research for a year before we began excavation," Project Director Al Chaloupka said.

Research included obtaining as many records as possible and interviewing people who were at the Lab in the 1940s and might know what was buried in MDA-B. The crew also performed 83 core samples on the site using direct push technology, a technique that 'pushes' tools into the ground and removes soil without drilling.

"We were able to gather lots of useful information," Chaloupka said. "But when you are excavating a waste disposal site this old, you have to expect surprises."

The first surprise came when the crew safely unearthed a pipe with a high level of radiation a few weeks after excavation began. Other surprises safely unearthed during excavation included two 1940s-era pickup trucks, a couple dozen jars of beryllium, four inert artillery shells, and a toothbrush.

"Needless to say, finding some of these items delayed excavation while we dealt with safety concerns," Chaloupka said. "That in turn affected our schedule and budget."

Other trash found in the pit included cardboard boxes, glass Coke bottles, and a calendar from 1943.

Several months later, the project is more than 80 percent complete, with excavation scheduled for completion this summer. While it's been a unique project, the challenges of excavating the unknown will be happily laid to rest when the last bucket of waste is unearthed.

With nearly 10 acres of land restored, what formerly was MDA-B will be available for potential reuse.

"Someday soon there will be houses or stores built here," Chaloupka said. "It's like coming full circle. The challenges we faced were minor compared to what the scientists in the 1940s faced, so it will be very satisfying to see this land clean and usable again." □

Top photo: Crews unearthed a total of four inert artillery shells unexpectedly while excavating Los Alamos National Laboratory's oldest waste dump.

Bottom photo: A toothbrush was one of the surprises that surfaced as Recovery Act crews excavated Los Alamos National Laboratory's oldest waste dump.

Keep on Truckin'

Waste haul from Technical Area 21 hits peak with completion scheduled for August 2011

LOS ALAMOS, N.M. – Hundreds of bins and 40 trucks logging 107,520 miles a week to six different destinations makes hauling waste from the Technical Area 21 (TA-21) Recovery Act projects a bit of a logistical challenge.

"Excavating more than 33,000 cubic yards of soil from Material Disposal Area B and demolishing 24 buildings at Technical Area 21 means we've generated a lot of waste that has to be hauled out of Los Alamos," said Don Allen, waste manager for the TA-21 Recovery Act projects. "And when you figure that we have 40 trucks making at least two trips a week to six different facilities, that translates to a lot of bins, a lot of coordination and a lot of organization."

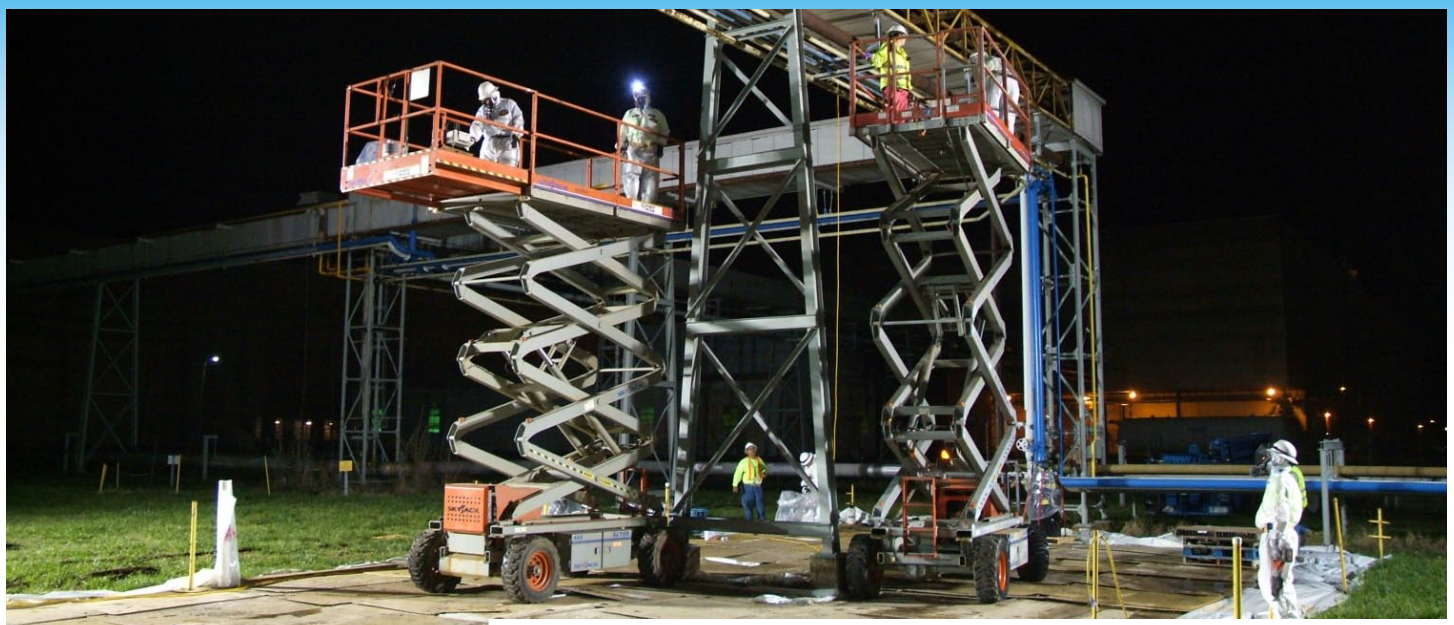
Coordinating the work of several different Lab organizations and the contractor adds to the organizational challenge, and the sheer volume of miles logged hauling the waste is staggering — more than 100,000 miles each week. Given that kind of mileage, the truckers' exemplary safety record is even more meaningful.

"When you think about that many trucks driving that many miles, our safety record is a real testament to the care and professionalism of the drivers," Allen said.

During the height of the demolition of 24 Manhattan Project and Cold War buildings and structures, the activity at TA-21 was generating more waste than the amount being hauled, with as many as 1,000 waste bins onsite waiting to be shipped. Recently, however, the waste haul hit its peak with more waste shipped than generated, which has reduced the onsite bin count to less than 800.

Despite the challenges, the waste haul at TA-21 is proceeding smoothly and is scheduled for completion in August 2011. □

Trucks have logged more than 100,000 miles each week hauling waste from the Los Alamos National Laboratory's Technical Area 21 projects.



Top photo: Second-shift Recovery Act workers at the Paducah Site use scissor lifts and metal saws to remove the outer cover of old uranium hexafluoride process tie lines linking C-410 with other parts of the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

Bottom photo: Heavy equipment starts to demolish the eastern third of the C-410 Feed Plant in April. C-410 is one of three cleanup and demolition projects at the Paducah Site expedited with about $80 million in Recovery Act funding.

Crane Operators Expedite...

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reach higher areas by using four portable ramps, two of which are bolted together to accommodate the larger crane.

The Feed Plant operated from 1957 to 1977 to produce uranium hexafluoride (UF6) and fluorine. Demolition of the eastern third of the complex, covering about a half-acre, is ongoing this spring. The remainder of the complex is scheduled to be cleaned up to prepare for demolition in 2012.

Wearing respirators and protective clothing, Recovery Act crews work in elevated, tight, hot conditions, cutting hard-alloy metal piping and removing hazardous materials. The workers have broken into day and night shifts and formed two teams — each with a supervisor — to combat heat stress while cleaning up uranium powder from parts of the complex.

The Feed Plant and C-340 Metals Plant are the only two remaining Recovery Act projects at the Paducah Site. Recovery Act workers continue to use a remote-controlled demolition machine to safely and efficiently remove contaminated piping and other systems from the "B" building, one of five structures comprising the Metals Plant. Similar equipment has been used at other DOE sites, but not at Paducah.

Metals Plant Recovery Act work is about 82 percent complete. The complex is scheduled to be ready for demolition by late July 2011. The Metals Plant spanned roughly 65,000 square feet and operated several decades ago to convert depleted uranium hexafluoride (DUF6) into uranium metal and uranium tetrafluoride (UF4). □

Recovery Act Workers Surpass Obstacles in Transuranic, Low-level Waste Cleanup

RICHLAND, Wash. – More than 60 years ago, plutonium production and processing facilities were built at the Hanford Site to support the nation's defense.

Recovery Act workers with DOE contractor CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company (CH2M HILL) are decommissioning many of those facilities, including the Plutonium Finishing Plant (PFP).

The big, heavy, and contaminated equipment inside these facilities cannot always leave the same way it entered.

"At Hanford's Plutonium Finishing Plant, we have large pieces of contaminated equipment called glove boxes and many of them were built in place. Some are well over 1,000 cubic feet in size. They are not easy to remove and several could not be removed without either reducing their size in place, or removing a substantial part of the building structure first. So, we had to find alternatives to get these structures out of the building or, where necessary, find ways to safely stabilize them in place for removal before we begin demolishing the building," said Bob Heineman, Recovery Act project manager for PFP and CH2M HILL.

Hanford recently achieved success in addressing the challenge of removing the glove boxes in a process area at PFP. Workers constructed a large containment enclosure where they could perform glove box work without impacting surrounding work areas.

In the enclosure, workers successfully cleaned and decontaminated three glove boxes, lowering their contamination level from transuranic to low-level so they can be disposed onsite. Onsite disposal reduces work risks and costs. Glove boxes do not have to be cut into pieces when they are disposed as low-level waste at Hanford. The equipment also can be disposed along with waste from building demolition.

Boxes contaminated at transuranic waste levels — which have atomic numbers greater than uranium — must be cut into pieces, packaged, and shipped to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico for safe, permanent disposal.

Recovery Act workers have removed a total of 124 glove boxes and are on pace to remove a total of 174 glove boxes with Recovery Act funds.

About $300 million from the Recovery Act is helping Hanford prepare the PFP complex for demolition several years ahead of a legal deadline of 2016. That requirement is included in the Tri-Party Agreement, an accord governing Hanford cleanup signed by DOE, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington State Department of Ecology. □

Top photo: Recovery Act workers remove a section of a glove box from the Plutonium Finishing Plant at the Hanford Site.

Bottom photo: The Hanford Site is using Recovery Act funds to remove glove boxes from the Plutonium Finishing Plant in preparation for demolition of the facility.

New Processes Enhance Safety in Waste Retrieval

RICHLAND, Wash. – The Hanford Site used Recovery Act funding to safely enhance methods and equipment for removing transuranic waste from underground storage, where it has resided in boxes, drums, and other configurations since the 1970s.

This "next generation" of processes and technology allows processing of waste drums to occur closer to the trench site, which helps reduce costs associated with transuranic waste removal and improve worker safety. The implementation of these processes and technology marked the completion of more than a year of preparatory work that included developing 10 new procedures and training 23 nuclear chemical operators and 15 radiological control technicians.

The project allowed for the use of new and revised processes for retrieving containers from waste trenches and real-time radiography (similar to an X-ray) to identify items in the containers that are prohibited for disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico, where transuranic waste is safely and permanently disposed.

Waste retrieval equipment and lessons learned from developing the processes and technology will be shared at other retrieval sites in the future as workers with DOE contractor CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company moves closer to reaching the Recovery Act goal to remove 2,500 cubic meters of transuranic waste from Hanford by the end of September 2011. So far, CH2M HILL has removed more than 1,497 cubic meters of waste from the trenches and shipped 936 cubic meters of that waste for treatment, storage, or disposal. □

Photos above, a container of waste is excavated from an underground storage trench at the Hanford Site. Recovery Act workers place the container into protective covering and it is hoisted from the trench and staged adjacent to the trench for processing.

Crews Move Past Challenges to Complete Recovery Act Project Safely, on Schedule

RICHLAND, Wash. – The Office of River Protection (ORP) is celebrating the recent completion of Recovery Act-funded work that upgraded waste transfer lines in a Hanford tank farm. Crews emphasized safety as they worked night and day to finish the project on time.

"It took a persistent effort and an incredible amount of teamwork to meet our deadline," said Project Manager Jim Kelly. "Crews worked swing shifts and weekends to make sure we stayed on schedule. I'm proud of our workers for maintaining focus on safety, following the work process, and completing the tasks on time."

Double-walled piping is used to transfer high-level radioactive waste between underground storage tanks at Hanford. The AZ tank farm, one of 18 tank farms that together have a total of 177 storage tanks, is being upgraded to prepare the tanks to feed waste to the Waste Treatment Plant under construction nearby. The Waste Treatment Plant will immobilize the high-level liquid waste by vitrifying it, turning it into a sturdy glass waste form suitable for disposal.

During the course of the project, workers installed roughly 80 feet of transfer line between two tanks. The transfer line is important because it allows distribution of the remaining liquid waste to the tanks, lengthening the interval between required tank mixing evolutions.

Tank mixing ensures even distribution of the various waste particles throughout the tank. This prevents the waste from becoming sedentary and collecting to form hardened masses. Keeping the waste mixed allows for greater mobility, and the waste is more readily pumped and removed.

"Our employees maintained a focus on safety to make sure the project was completed successfully," Tank Farms Projects Manager Rob Gregory said. "It was truly a team effort."

The accomplishment keeps Recovery Act work at Hanford's tank farms on schedule for completion by September 2011. Many projects are scheduled for completion in July, well ahead of schedule. Through April, Washington River Protection Solutions, ORP's prime contractor, had spent $259 million in Recovery Act funds to complete 81 percent of identified Recovery Act work scope. □

Upper left photo: Workers prepare to install new Recovery Act-funded equipment in a Hanford tank farm.

Michael R. Walker - WA

Construction Field Execution Manager, CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company

Accelerating cleanup offers unique opportunities, challenges to experienced workforce

RICHLAND, Wash. – Nearly four decades of construction experience serves Michael R. Walker well in his self-described "bulldog" role overseeing construction crews on the Recovery Act-funded 200 West Groundwater Treatment Facility construction project on the Hanford Site's Central Plateau.

Walker's proven experience would not have been brought to Hanford were it not for Recovery Act funding for the project. When the Recovery Act accelerated construction of what is the site's largest groundwater treatment project, Walker was able to move his family to the Tri-Cities and take on the kind of challenge he loves most: construction management. Walker was hired by CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company, the DOE contractor hired for the environmental cleanup of Hanford's Central Plateau.

"They needed someone to walk on site, do problem resolution, and manage a crew of managers, craft workers and engineers out in the field," Walker said.

Walker expects the network he's built working on the 200 West project to springboard him to another job. Construction of the facility is scheduled for completion by the end of September 2011.

"This project taught me to be a better manager of people. You should still hold people accountable for results, but you don't have to expect them to do everything your way," Walker said.

Recovery Act workers remove transite panels from the roof of CPP-602, a facility once part of the fuel reprocessing complex at the Idaho Site.

Recovery Act Workers Safely Prepare Idaho Site Facility for Demolition

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho – Recovery Act workers at the Idaho site did not let adverse weather deter them from demolishing structures at the Idaho Nuclear Technology and Engineering Center as they complete decontamination and decommissioning (D&D) work.

High winds exceeding 25 miles per hour have been an obstacle for the D&D of CPP-602, a facility once part of the fuel reprocessing complex at the Idaho Site. When those winds subsided, workers prepared the structure for a complete teardown by safely removing asbestos-containing transite panels from the walls and roof, exposing the building's framework.

"We expect the unexpected and are prepared for the worst thing that can happen. It's typically not routine," said Dan Coyne, D&D Vice President at CH2M-WG Idaho (CWI), the Idaho site's cleanup contractor.

CWI's Engineering and Safety & Health Department — with input from the Recovery Act crew — provided excellent plans to ensure worker safety, said Tom Dogal, D&D project manager for CWI.

"The crew did an outstanding job fighting the elements to complete transite removal. All the transite was removed without incident or injury, which is excellent considering the working surface and fall hazard," Dogal said.

In preparation for the CPP-602 demolition, workers relocated the "dial room" in its basement — a central hub for communications and information technologies support systems — elsewhere onsite. The new dial room was officially activated in early March 2011.

Last year, workers demolished the adjacent CPP-601 fuel reprocessing facility.

> **"The crew did an outstanding job fighting the elements to complete transite removal. All the transite was removed without incident or injury, which is excellent considering the working surface and fall hazard."**
>
> *Tom Dogal, D&D project manager for CWI.*

Both CPP-601 and 602 once formed the center of spent nuclear fuel reprocessing facilities at the Idaho Site, where more than $1 billion of uranium was recovered. The structures were among the first built in the early 1950s at what was originally known as the Idaho Chemical Processing Plant.

The teardown of CPP-602 is scheduled for completion this summer.

As part of the Idaho site cleanup funded by $468 million from the Recovery Act, workers have efficiently and safely decontaminated excess and obsolete structures, including nuclear reactors and hot cells. More than 481,000 square feet of facilities, structures and laboratories have been demolished. □

Workers Continue to Clean Up Off Gas Cell at West Valley Demonstration Project

WEST VALLEY, N.Y. – Recovery Act workers at the West Valley Demonstration Project have safely removed a highly contaminated tank from the Off Gas Cell (OGC) inside the former Main Plant nuclear fuel reprocessing facility, marking a major accomplishment in the cell's cleanup.

Because of its high contamination level, Tank 6D-3 was the most challenging of four tanks workers removed from the cell, which was used in the former commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing activities at the site. Removal of the tanks helps reduce radioactive rates in the cell.

Workers are scheduled to remove nine more tanks from the cell as part of ongoing efforts to clear its contents to prepare the five-story plant for demolition. The OGC is one of a few remaining cells in the plant that still contains original reprocessing tanks.

Wearing protective suits, workers used spot shielding to protect from radiation while safely removing Tank 6D-3. All four tanks removed from the cell were safely covered to contain the contamination, lifted by a crane through a roof hatch, and lowered into a waste box. Once the tanks are packaged, they are turned over to the site's waste management department to prepare for disposal.

Vessel 7D-15 is the next in line for removal from the cell. Clearing that vessel from the cell will be another significant accomplishment for the OGC team.

Workers will then place concrete shielding in the northwest corner of the cell to protect from another radioactive hot spot. That shielding will allow workers to safely remove the remaining tanks and piping from the upper portions of the cell.

The OGC clean out is scheduled for completion by the end of June 2011. □

Top photo: Workers remove a vessel from the Off Gas Cell at the West Valley Demonstration Project. The tanks are safely wrapped in a cover to prevent the spread of contamination.

Bottom photo: A vessel is removed from the Off Gas Cell at the West Valley Demonstration Project.

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