Fact Sheet

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY | Legacy Management

BONUS, Puerto Rico, Decommissioned Reactor Site

A D&D site

This fact sheet provides information about the **BONUS site**. Long-term stewardship responsibilities for this site are managed by the **U.S. Department of Energy Office of Legacy Management** under the **Defense Decontamination and Decommissioning Program**.

Site Information and History

The decommissioned Boiling Nuclear Superheater (BONUS) reactor, located northwest of Rincón, Puerto Rico, was developed as a prototype nuclear power plant to investigate the technical and economic feasibility of the integral boiling-superheating concept. This small-scale nuclear reactor produced saturated steam in the central portion of the reactor core, superheated it in four surrounding "superheater" sections of the same core, and then used the superheated steam in a direct loop to drive a turbine generator.

The BONUS facility was the eighth nuclear power plant constructed in the world and first in Latin America. It was one of only two boiling-water superheater reactors ever developed in the United States. The reactor was designed to be large enough to evaluate the major features of the integral boiling-superheating concept realistically without the high construction and operating costs associated with a large plant.

Construction of the reactor began in 1960, through a combined effort of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and Puerto Rico Water Resources Authority (PRWRA). The reactor first achieved a controlled nuclear chain reaction on April 13, 1964. It underwent a series of criticality tests and then was operated experimentally at various power levels, first as a boiler and later as an integral boiler-superheater. Operation at full power (50 megawatts of thermal energy) and full temperature (900°F [482°C] steam) was achieved in September 1965, and tests demonstrated satisfactory operation at 10 percent over power in November 1965.

Operation of the BONUS reactor was terminated in June 1968 because of technical difficulties and the ensuing need for high-cost modifications. PRWRA decommissioned the reactor between 1969 and 1970. During decommissioning, all special nuclear materials (fuel) and certain highly activated components (e.g., control rods and shims) were removed to the mainland, all piping systems were flushed. The reactor vessel and associated internal components within the biological shield were entombed in concrete and grout, and systems external to the entombment were decontaminated. Many contaminated and activated materials were placed in the main circulation pump room beneath the pressure vessel and entombed in concrete.

General decontamination of the reactor was performed with the goal of meeting unrestricted use criteria in all accessible areas of the building. Residual radioactive materials remaining in the structure were isolated or shielded to protect site visitors and workers. During subsequent years, more radioactive contamination was identified in portions of the building, and additional cleanup and shielding activities were conducted in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Regulatory Setting

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), as the successor agency to AEC, and in accordance with the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, holds title to and is responsible for the radioactive materials that remain at the BONUS site.

The Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA), as the successor agency to PRWRA, owns the land, buildings, and other improvements. Responsibilities for the long-term surveillance and maintenance of the site are established for DOE and PREPA through a Letter of Agreement (LOA) between the DOE Office of Legacy Management (LM) and PREPA for the use, maintenance, and control of the BONUS facility. LM will conduct activities (explained below) and other responsibilities assigned to DOE.

DOE, as the authorized custodian of the radioactive materials remaining at the BONUS site, will comply with the following regulation and guidance. Title 10 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR), Part 835 establishes radiation protection standards, limits, and program requirements for protecting workers from ionizing radiation resulting from DOE activities. DOE Order 5400.5, Radiation Protection of the Public and the Environment, establishes standards and requirements for DOE operations with respect to protection of the environment and members of the public from risk of radiological exposure.

PREPA, in accordance with the LOA, will maintain compliance with applicable portions of Title 10 CFR Part 835 through its radiological monitoring of the BONUS site. The radiological monitoring will survey the designated areas within the reactor facility to ensure worker and public safety.

Legacy Management Activities

LM and PREPA are responsible for ensuring that the BONUS site continues to be protective of human health and the environment. These agencies will also preserve site information.

Effective in 2019, LM will conduct inspections of the site every other year. Visual inspections are conducted to evaluate the structural adequacy of the buildings and entombment structure and the condition of the areas open to public access. In addition, LM will maintain site records pertaining to BONUS design, construction, operation, decommissioning, and post-decommissioning monitoring.

Public Involvement

PREPA invites groups to the museum on the main floor of the BONUS building, where numerous displays recount the history of the site, as well as the development of electric power and nuclear energy. DOE completed an environmental assessment in 2003 that indicated no unacceptable risk to human health or the environment if the main floor is used as a museum.

The BONUS Site Reactor Dome Was Repainted in 2014.

CONTACT INFORMATION

IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY AT THE SITE, CONTACT 911

LM TOLL-FREE EMERGENCY HOTLINE: (877) 695-5322

Site-specific documents related to the **BONUS, Puerto Rico, Decommissioned Reactor Site** are available on the LM website at **www.energy.gov/lm/bonus-puerto-rico-decommissioned-reactor-site**.

For more information about LM activities at the **BONUS, Puerto Rico, Decommissioned Reactor Site**, contact:

U.S. Department of Energy
Office of Legacy Management
2597 Legacy Way
Grand Junction, CO 81503

Email:
public.affairs@lm.doe.gov

DOE Office of Legacy Management
(970) 248-6070

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08/2022