

# DOE NEWS

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## **RADIOACTIVE SLUDGE CONSOLIDATION COMPLETE**

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and contractor Fluor Hanford have finished the consolidation of radioactive sludge from the floors of Hanford’s K Basins, located about 400 yards from the Columbia River at the Hanford Site in Washington State. As a result, what had been one of Hanford’s primary threats to the Columbia River is now controlled and ready for ultimate treatment and disposal.

“Every victory we’ve had at the K Basins has been hard fought, and this one is certainly no different,” said Matt McCormick, DOE Assistant Manager for the Central Plateau. “We applaud the creativity and perseverance of the workforce as we all continue to push forward on this difficult project.”

Consolidation of the estimated 47 cubic yards of radioactive sludge from the floors of both basins into engineered containers in the K West Basin began in October 2004. As they removed the sludge, workers encountered several significant challenges,

including uncovering much more debris than expected. As suction hoses and transfer pumps clogged, workers designed new equipment, and convinced management to change the schedule to put debris removal first to make sludge vacuuming more effective. Milestones for sludge removal in the Tri-Party Agreement among DOE, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency were changed to accommodate the new approach. In the past two years, workers have met all of the adjusted milestones for sludge cleanup.

The milestone called for DOE to place the bulk of the estimated 10 cubic yards (8 cubic meters) of sludge in the K West Basin into containers and finish vacuuming up any residual sludge by January 31, 2008. Fluor Hanford began containerizing the K West sludge in December 2006, finished with the bulk of it in July, and completed final-pass vacuuming on December 27, 2007.

“Today marks another major cleanup accomplishment for the K Basins,” said Mark Peres, Fluor Hanford. “I could not be more proud of our team. They completed a very difficult and important job with great skill, and most importantly they did the work safely. Their hard work has reduced the risks that radioactive sludge posed to the environment and our friends and families along the Columbia River.”

The highly radioactive sludge is a combination of dirt, sand, corrosion products, sloughed concrete from the basin walls, and/or fission products that formed throughout the years of underwater spent fuel storage. It was vacuumed into stainless-steel tanks in the K West Basin that provide a secondary barrier to the environment and will serve as the feed tanks for a sludge-treatment system.

“Consolidation of K-Basin sludge achieves two important goals; first, it greatly reduces short-term risk of a release to the environment,” said Nick Ceto, the U.S. EPA’s Hanford Program Manager, “and second, it allows us to look forward to final cleanup of all contaminated soils, structures, and groundwater at the K-Reactor Area.”

In October, workers placed a grout cap over the floor of the K East Basin. In the coming months, they will drain its water, fill it with a sand-like material, and begin demolishing the basin. Ultimately, workers will remove the underlying soil that was contaminated by water leaks from the K East Basin in the 1970s and 1990s.

Following treatment of the sludge now consolidated in containers in the K West Basin, workers will also demolish and remove that basin.

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