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Investigation Involving Waste Drum Continues at DOE Idaho Site

IDAHO FALLS, ID - U.S. Department of Energy and Fluor Idaho officials are continuing an investigation into the cause of a waste drum incident April 11 at the Accelerated Retrieval Project V (ARP V) facility of the Department of Energy's Radioactive Waste Management Complex (RWMC).

No injuries were reported and no environmental contamination was detected outside the ARP V facility from the incident involving at least one container of radioactive waste in the building. A drum experienced a pressure excursion that resulted in the breach of the drum lid. Further investigation is taking place on the condition of other drums staged nearby in the facility.

The waste from the incident likely was sent to Idaho in the late 1960s from the Rocky Flats Plant near Denver, Colo. Since 2012, the ARP V facility has processed and repackaged approximately 9,500 drums of sludge-contaminated waste to remove liquids and prohibited items from the waste in preparation for shipment to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico for permanent disposal. The suspect waste drum had been processed on the afternoon of April 11, repackaged, and was staged among several other repackaged waste drums for several hours before the event occurred. The drum had not completed the final characterization, treatment, and certification process required for shipment to WIPP.

As a precaution, all waste shipments to WIPP were temporarily suspended. Shipments to WIPP resumed April 17 following confirmation the disposal facility had not received any of the same type of waste material. Additional barrels of the same type of Rocky Flats waste stored outside the ARP V facility in other locations at the RWMC were inspected on April 12 with thermal imaging equipment, and sampled for volatile organic compounds. These additional drums showed no abnormal conditions and will continue to be monitored.

The April 11 event closely resembled scenarios that site emergency response personnel have been trained to respond to for many years. Those scenarios train personnel on the necessary emergency response actions, the procedure to obtain frequent radiological survey measurements, and the establishment of safe boundaries around the affected facility.

The ARP V facility is designed to contain any contamination inside the building. It has a negative air flow, pulling air from the outside and channeling all exhaust through the facility's high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters that trap contaminants. Following the April 11 event, Fluor Idaho teams inspected the facility's physical condition and the facility's HEPA-filtered exhaust ventilation systems and found no issues or degradation.

Fluor Idaho, LLC is a wholly owned subsidiary of Fluor Corporation with partners comprised of CH2M, North Wind Inc., Portage, and Waste Control Specialists. Fluor Idaho manages the Idaho Cleanup Project Core contract at the Department of Energy's Idaho Site located 45 miles west of Idaho Falls. The 5-year, $1.4 billion project, funded through the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management, focuses on early risk reduction and protection of the Snake River Plain Aquifer.

For more information visit the Idaho Cleanup Project on the Web at https://fluor-idaho.com