



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF **ENERGY**

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Crews at the DOE Idaho Site Complete Transuranic Waste Retrieval

Idaho Falls, Idaho - For more than 20 years, a gigantic building – covering seven acres of land at the U.S. Department of Energy’s Idaho site – has been the temporary storage location for hundreds of thousands of containers filled with radioactively contaminated materials.

About the size of an aircraft carrier, the Transuranic Storage Area-Retrieval Enclosure (TSA-RE) covered an earthen berm that protected more than 50,000 cubic meters of metal drums and boxes containing transuranic waste. In February, the final box was safely retrieved bringing an end to retrieval activities at the Department’s Advanced Mixed Waste Treatment Project, located 50 miles west of Idaho Falls, ID. An additional 15,000 cubic meters of waste had been stored in nearby storage modules and is included in the project.

Retrieval of the above-ground stored transuranic waste was scheduled to be completed by this May. But an experienced workforce, innovative tools, and a safe work mindset enabled the project to finish ahead of schedule.

“Completing the retrieval of the waste stored in TSA-RE is an important achievement for the Department of Energy,” said Jack Zimmerman, Deputy Manager for the Idaho Cleanup Project at the DOE Idaho Operations Office. “Retrieving waste that has been buried in an earthen berm for nearly 40 years is a complicated task, and to complete the work safely and ahead of schedule is a testament to the experience and tenacity of this project’s employees.”

When excavation and retrieval activities started in 2003, backhoes and shovels were used to remove dirt from the 35-foot tall earthen berm to start retrieving drums and boxes. The first containers retrieved, having been under the berm the least amount of time, were in good structural shape and could be safely removed and stored, prior to their characterization, treatment, and shipment out of Idaho. However, as the project progressed to the older containers, the condition of the containers was noticeably degraded.

“The complexity and hazards that retrieval crews faced while performing their work cannot be overstated. Many of the final drums and boxes were degraded after decades under dirt, challenging our workers,” said Fred Hughes, Program Manager for Idaho Cleanup Project Core contractor Fluor Idaho. “Understanding

what they were up against, these skilled crews, working with robust administrative and engineered controls, made remarkable progress in further protecting the Snake River Plain Aquifer.” Fluor Idaho oversees environmental management work for the Department of Energy at its Idaho site.

During the final five years of retrieval, crews reached containers that had been under the dirt for decades; many degraded containers were encountered. Through a thoughtful, deliberate approach, specially developed tools, and a confidence borne from experienced crews were able to remove the degraded containers, repack the materials into new sturdy containers, and complete retrieval of the waste without any unexpected release of contamination, serious injury, or incident.

Each of the drums and boxes retrieved from the TSA-RE has, or will be, repackaged and prepared for shipment out of Idaho for final disposal in accordance with the 1995 Idaho Settlement Agreement.

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