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THE HANFORD SITE

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Workers at Hanford Site Remove Radioactive Waste from 21st Large Underground Tank

RICHLAND, Wash. – Workers have finished removing radioactive waste from the 21st large underground storage tank as part of the massive cleanup of the site in southeast Washington state.

Tank AX-101 is also the last of four emptied in a group of tanks, called the AX Farm. Waste removed from the 21 tanks totals about 3 million gallons.

“This is another important moment in our Hanford cleanup work,” said Brian Vance, the Department of Energy’s top manager at Hanford. “Safely and efficiently transferring waste from older to newer tanks continues to reduce risks to our workforce and our community as we progress our cleanup mission on behalf of the nation’s taxpayers.”

From 1944 to 1989, Hanford produced 74 tons of plutonium for the country’s nuclear weapons program. To store the radioactive and chemical byproducts, the site built thick, reinforced concrete tanks lined inside with steel and buried under several feet of soil to shield workers from radiation. The tanks held up to a million gallons each, and when production stopped at the end of the Cold War, 56 million gallons of waste was in 177 of the large tanks.

The Department and its contractors are moving the waste out of the older tanks with a single steel liner into newer tanks that have a second liner for leak protection. Those tanks will feed the waste

to the nearby Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant that will treat the waste for safe disposal starting next year.

To empty the 21st tank, contractor Washington River Protection Solutions, supported by other Hanford contractors, removed about 350,000 gallons waste from the million-gallon single shell Tank AX-101.

“The work is some of the most challenging and complex in the Department’s mission to clean up sites across the country that supported our national security objectives from World War II to the end of the Cold War” said Delmar Noyes, DOE Hanford assistant manager for Tank Waste Operations. “Hanford teams removing the waste are meticulous in managing radiological, chemical, and industrial hazards while progressing our cleanup mission,” he added.

“The retrieval teams are successful because they have taken ownership of the work and our risk-reduction mission,” said Peggy Hamilton, Retrievals manager for Washington River Protection Solutions. “We continue to make great progress in retrieving tank waste because the teams are dedicated to working safely, efficiently and keeping up their skills through continuous training.”

Hanford workers won’t stop at 21. They will start removing waste from the 22nd tank later this month.

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The Department of Energy (DOE) is engaged in one of the great public works of this century at the Hanford Site near Richland, Washington. Responsible for the federal government’s cleanup of the legacy of more than 40 years of producing plutonium through the 1980s, DOE is transforming the site back into a 24/7 operations mode to treat tank waste from the production era. The DOE Office of River Protection (ORP) is responsible for the safe and efficient retrieval, treatment and disposal of the 56 million gallons of chemical and radioactive waste stored in Hanford’s 177 underground tanks. The mission includes building and commissioning the world’s largest radioactive waste treatment plant, which will immobilize the legacy tank waste through vitrification. The DOE Richland Operations Office is responsible for all remaining Hanford cleanup and is currently focused on stabilizing and demolishing former plutonium production structures, excavating and disposing of contaminated soil and waste, treating contaminated groundwater, and configuring Hanford Site infrastructure for the future, with an emphasis on supporting the tank waste mission. Hanford Site work is conducted by a federal and contractor workforce of approximately 13,000 personnel. Visit www.hanford.gov for more information about the Hanford Site.



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