



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY IDAHO OPERATIONS OFFICE
1955 Fremont Avenue, Idaho Falls, Idaho, 83403

Danielle
Miller, (208)
526-5709

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Media Contact:

millerdc@id.doe.gov

Eric Simpson, (208) 360-0426
Eric.Simpson@icp.doe.gov

Crews at the DOE Idaho Site Complete Buried Waste Cleanup Accomplishment

Crews with Fluor Idaho, LLC, at the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Idaho Site have completed a significant cleanup accomplishment that further protects the underlying Snake River Plain Aquifer, the primary drinking and irrigation water source for more than 300,000 Idahoans.

Workers recently satisfied a provision of a 2008 agreement among the DOE, state of Idaho and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) by packaging a total of 7,485 cubic meters of exhumed hazardous and radioactive waste that was generated at the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons production plant near Denver and was then buried in Idaho in the 1950s and 1960s. The amount of waste exhumed is equivalent to nearly 36,000 55-gallon drums of material.

Per the agreement, crews will continue to remove radioactive and hazardous waste from a combined area of 5.69 acres of the unlined 97-acre landfill called the Subsurface Disposal Area (SDA) at the Radioactive Waste Management Complex (RWMC). To date, Fluor Idaho and two previous contractors have exhumed waste from 4.24 acres, and the project remains about two years ahead of schedule. Fluor Idaho will continue exhumation until all of the 5.69 acres are exhumed.

Once exhumed, characterized and repackaged, the waste is shipped out of Idaho for disposal. Following the completion of waste exhumation, a soil cap will be installed over the entire SDA.

To complete the 2008 agreement between the DOE, state of Idaho the EPA, just two of nine different areas within the 97-acre SDA are left to be exhumed.

The waste exhumation project, which began in 2005, is targeting removal of the highest concentrations of solvents and transuranic radionuclides (such as plutonium and americium) buried in the landfill.

Currently, Fluor Idaho crews are 56 percent complete on the eighth area, and are working to remove hazardous and radioactive buried waste within a steel-framed, fabric-sided building. Waste exhumation in that building is expected to continue into 2017. Construction of the building over the ninth and final area within the SDA began in July of 2016 and should be complete in 2017. Waste exhumation will begin post-construction and is expected to be completed in 2020.