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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 23, 2016

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DOE Informs State of Idaho It Is Unlikely to Meet Deadline for Startup of Waste Treatment Facility

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho—The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has notified the State of Idaho that it is unlikely to meet the regulatory deadline for initiation of waste treatment of the sodium-bearing waste at the Integrated Waste Treatment Unit (IWTU) at the Idaho National Laboratory Site. Under the Fifth Modification to the Notice of Noncompliance-Consent Order with the State of Idaho, DOE agreed to a compliance schedule that included beginning treatment of the remaining 900,000 gallons of liquid sodium bearing radioactive waste at the INL in the IWTU by Sept. 30, 2016.

"The Department understands the importance of meeting this milestone," said Jack Zimmerman, DOE Deputy Manager for the Idaho Cleanup Project. "However, safety is our top priority and we will not begin radioactive waste treatment until we are convinced we can do it safely."

As part of the startup process, DOE has conducted a set of waste simulant runs at the IWTU. In order to safely commence treatment of the sodium bearing waste at the facility, DOE must address two technical issues that have arisen during these waste simulant runs. One is the need to eliminate or significantly reduce the buildup of material, known as wall scale, in the IWTU's main processing vessel. The second is the need to evaluate modification or replacement of a component of the main processing vessel, known as the ring header, which is critical in the treatment of waste.

DOE's new Idaho Cleanup Project contractor, Fluor Idaho, LLC, is expected to submit a schedule outlining how it will safely initiate radioactive operations at the IWTU, including addressing the wall scale buildup and ring header. After reviewing and approving Fluor's proposed approach for operating IWTU, DOE will submit a new treatment schedule to the State of Idaho for review and approval. The Department is working with the state on a new schedule for completion.

"We've made a lot of progress in better understanding the facility, changing processes and equipment, and giving our operators real world experience in running the plant through multiple simulant runs," said Zimmerman. "The plant is operating in a more robust manner and we believe we have narrowed the main issues down to two, the wall scale buildup and ring header."