

Third Buried Waste Retrieval Project under way at DOE Idaho Site

The Idaho Cleanup Project has recently begun removing Cold War weapons waste from a third retrieval area at the Department of Energy's Radioactive Waste Management Complex (RWMC) in eastern Idaho.

The Accelerated Retrieval Project-III (ARP-III) began retrieving targeted waste consisting of plutonium-contaminated filters, graphite molds, solidified radioactively and organically contaminated sludges and oxidized uranium material on December 10, 2008. These materials originated at the Rocky Flats Plant near Denver, Colorado, during nuclear weapons production activities in the 1960s and were packaged in drums and sent to Idaho for buried disposal.



An inside view of the Accelerated Retrieval Project III enclosure
[Click on image for larger picture](#)

Targeted waste is being repackaged into 55-gallon drums. The radioactive wastes classified as transuranic are prepared and shipped to DOE's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant facility in New Mexico for permanent disposal, while other classes of radioactive waste are sent to other appropriate off-site treatment and/or disposal facilities.

In 2005, the U.S. Department of Energy, with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state of Idaho concurrence, began waste exhumation in the ARP-I facility to remove targeted wastes from a half-acre portion of Pit 4 at the RWMC's 97-acre Subsurface Disposal Area (SDA). ARP-I waste exhumation was completed in early 2008.

In 2007, crews began waste exhumation in the ARP-II facility from the eastern portion of Pit 4 and part of Pit 6 to remove some of the highest accumulation of plutonium-contaminated waste and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) within the burial ground. Organic compounds represent the greatest threat to the underlying Snake River Plain Aquifer, which lies 585 feet below the landfill. Waste exhumation in the ARP-II facility is approximately 60 percent complete.

ARP-III will exhume waste from the eastern portion of Pit 6, containing some of the highest densities of radioactively-contaminated waste and solidified solvents in the SDA.

All excavations at the SDA are taking place with the use of modified excavation equipment designed to protect workers from airborne contaminants. Metal framed buildings with fabric linings are erected over the buried waste pits and utilize high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters within ventilation systems.

Established in 1952, the RWMC disposed of site-generated radioactive and hazardous wastes. From 1954 through 1970, the landfill received wastes from the Rocky Flats Plant and other off-site generators.

The DOE, EPA and state of Idaho signed a record of decision (ROD) in September 2008, which calls for the removal of targeted wastes from a combined area of 5.69 acres, grouting in place of select mobile fission product wastes and placement of a permanent evapotranspiration surface barrier or cap over the entire 97-acre burial ground. The ROD is consistent with the Department of Energy and the State of Idaho's July 3, 2008 Agreement to Implement the U.S. District Court Order dated May 25, 2006. To date, more than 2,330 cubic meters of waste zone materials have been retrieved and packaged at the SDA from a combined area of 0.73 acres. Retrieval of targeted waste will continue until approximately 2025, followed by construction of the surface barrier, which is expected to be completed in 2028.

CH2M-WG Idaho, LLC, directs the Idaho Cleanup Project, the safe, environmental cleanup of the Idaho National Laboratory site, located 45 miles west of Idaho Falls. The 7-year, \$2.9 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.

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