

Demolition of primary nuke waste facility celebrated at West Valley

- By Rick Miller, County Reporter, Sep 28, 2018



Bryan Bower, director of the West Valley Demonstration Project for the U.S. Department of Energy, speaks Thursday at a celebration marking the completion of the vitrification facility. The building is where 600,000 gallons of high-level radioactive liquid was solidified into glass from 1996 to 2002.

WEST VALLEY — The safe completion of the demolition of the most important facility in the cleanup at the West Valley Demonstration Project was celebrated Thursday.

The U.S. Department of Energy, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and contractor CH2M Hill BWXT gathered with hundreds of employees to mark the year-long demolition of the vitrification facility.

It was the facility where 600,000 gallons of highly radioactive liquid waste left over from operation of the nation's first and only commercial spent nuclear fuel reprocessing plant were solidified into glass between 1996 and 2002.

"It was a very important part of the Phase 1 decommissioning," Scott Anderson, president of CHBWV, said of the demolition.

Anderson also commended employees for another important milestone, the completion of the shipping of 180,000 tons of legacy waste — mixed low-level waste in storage and from ongoing site activities. The waste was shipped in more than 3,500 containers to disposal sites in Texas and Utah.

That legacy waste included the 400,000-pound melter inside the vitrification facility, a 50-foot tall, 10,000-square-foot building of heavily reinforced concrete.

The melter was used to create 275 glass-filled steel containers, each 10 feet tall. They are now stored in 56 concrete casks on an open concrete pad at the site. There is no storage or disposal site for the material.

Anderson said there was "no spread of contamination" from the demolition of the vitrification facility by American Demolition and Dismantling Co. and the West Valley team.

"They met the challenges head-on as a team," Anderson said.

Other challenges in the demolition — which proceeded during winter months — included removal of a 200,000-pound shield door, heavy cooling units from the ceiling and packaging a large dissolver that had to be cut in two.

Bryan Bower, U.S. Department of Energy director of the West Valley Demonstration Project, said that buildings surrounding the main process building would be demolished next. The main process building will not be demolished to ground level by CHBWV as part of the current contract as originally planned. That demolition will be part of the next contract.

"The focus now is decommissioning," Bower said. The demolition of the vitrification facility "is an important milestone. It completes the vitrification mission and accomplishes another first in the nation" for West Valley.

"The wrap-up of decades of work is what you see here today," Bower said. The demolition was done "without any major releases into the environment" and with the safety of workers in mind.

Bower noted another "visual" change at the West Valley Demonstration Project, the removal earlier this month of most of the 167-foot ventilation stack atop the main process building.

"We can see a skyline change," he said. "It's a very visual representation of all the work we've done."

The administration building, the first building constructed at the site in the 1960s when it was operated by Nuclear Fuel Services, a subsidiary of Getty Oil, has also been demolished, Bower said.

Nuclear Fuel Services abandoned the plant in 1976 after closing it in 1972 for environmental improvements. It never reopened.

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