

The logo for the Olean Times Herald, featuring the text "OLEAN TIMES HERALD" in a bold, serif font. The text is centered and overlaid on a blurred background image of an industrial facility with buildings and smokestacks.

Open-air demolition delayed at West Valley Main Process Building

- By RICK MILLER, Olean Times Herald

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ASHFORD HOLLOW — The open-air demolition of the Main Process Building at the West Valley Demonstration Project has been delayed indefinitely.

Contractor CHBWB has been asked by the U.S. Department of Energy to look into cleaning up areas not included in the original Phase I contract while the demolition of the Main Process Building is on hold.

Scott Anderson, CHBWB president and general manager, told members of the West Valley Citizens Task Force on Wednesday the Main Process Building was 95 percent deactivated. "We've still got some challenges," he added.

Bryan Bower, the Department of Energy director at the West Valley Demonstration Project nuclear cleanup, said that while the Main Process Building was included in the current contract, DOE officials are "re-thinking open-air demolition."

Cleaning up below-grade cells that were not part of the current contract will lessen the amount of radioactive material in the building and keep crews working, Bower said.

Anderson said crews will focus instead on seven ancillary buildings surrounding the Main Process Building. They are also working to rebuild infrastructure including natural gas and electrical lines that are more than 50 years old

The U.S. Department of Energy delayed the open-air razing of the Main Process Building — where spent nuclear fuel from nuclear power plants was reprocessed from the mid-1960s until 1972 — following an unexpected release last year of radioactivity during demolition in Hanford, Wash.

Bower said he could not discuss any timetable for a decision on whether an open-air demolition would be carried out.

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Anderson told Citizen Task Force member Raymond Vaughn that the Hanford release had left DOE officials nervous over open-air demolition.

He said that Western New York winters make demolition more difficult. The demolition of the vitrification building showed that "maybe you need a structure to work in, maybe not," he said.

Bower said no decision had been made on whether the demolition would be open-air or not. The DOE is seeking requests for proposals on what to do with below-grade cells.

"There are a handful of cells in the main plant that make us nervous," Bower said.

Citizen Task Force member Joseph Pati asked whether the hole in the roof left after removal of the remaining stack on the Main Process Building had been repaired.

"To some extent," replied Anderson. There are some areas of the roof where officials would like to put a temporary patch to keep water out of the plant.

Bower also said the government shutdown had not impacted the cleanup at the nation's first commercial nuclear reprocessing plant. The DOE is not among the federal departments involved in the partial shutdown that began Dec. 22.

Work continues toward a preferred alternative for Phase II cleanup at the West Valley site. That draft recommendation is probably two years away.

The Citizens Task Force has called in the past for a full cleanup of the site including removal of underground tanks that once held 600,000 gallons of highly radioactive liquid wastes, as well as the removal of state and NRC-licensed disposal sites.

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