



Photo by Max Borsuk

Paul Dabbar (center) talks with Deputy Director Craig Rieman (left) and Site Director Brian Bower (right) during his visit to the West Valley Demonstration Project.

DOE Under Secretary for Science Dabbar visits WVDP

Max Borsuk Editor

To see the progress of decommissioning work at the **West Valley Demonstration Project**, Department of Energy Under Secretary for Science Paul M. Dabbar made a visit to the site. Dabbar was given a tour of the **WVDP** on Sept. 23 by Site Director Brian Bower, Deputy Director Craig Rieman and others involved at the site, with Dabbar leaving impressed with everything going on.

The Environmental Management Cleanup Program, which is under Dabbar's area in the DOE, was charged with cleaning up 107 sites across the country, with 91 of those sites currently completely cleaned up and 45 having portions turned over to the local community. Dabbar said **WVDP** is "one of the most important projects" and is excited to see the progress going on in **West Valley**.

“We have been very focused at the remaining ones including West Valley,” Dabbar said. “There are a number of complexities associated with this particular site, but what’s been truly exciting about the program and here in particular is that there has been a lot of near-term progress that has been made.”

Dabbar commented on the demolition of the vitrification facility in West Valley, which solidified radioactive high-level waste at the site. With other sites including Savannah River, S.C. or Hanford, Wash. either having vitrification facilities or having one built in the future, Dabbar said the work at West Valley of designing, building, running, processing and demolishing its vitrification facility can help other sites down the road.

“That is a real success for the American people, the taxpayer and the local community,” Dabbar said. “Whenever we do a cleanup operation at any site, especially ones where there is similar technology, we learn a lot associated with that. [WVDP] was the first vitrification plant, this was the first vitrification plant torn down ... and there is a lot of specific engineering issues of the melters and the other components that was learned here that will be directly applicable to that cleanup.”

A future big projects to happen at the West Valley Demonstration Project is the demolition of the main process building. Dabbar said the plans for the demolition are not fully laid out and plans are still being worked out with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. Dabbar added that the work done on WVDP’s vitrification facility will help when it becomes time for demolition of the main process building.

Dabbar assured West Valley residents that work at the WVDP has been making significant progress and crews are doing a great job during the decommissioning. With work including the demolition of vitrification facility and getting waste shipped off site, Dabbar commended everyone at WVDP for their work as they continue making improvements.

“I can say that as compared to where it was not that long ago, there is significantly less waste,” Dabbar said. “I can’t say enough positive about the workforce here, about the leadership team here and the people who work here everyday. It’s not just about the buildings coming down, it’s about they came down and put into containers and vast majority of it is out of state. I think that is really positive here.”

WVDP participates in full-scale exercise to prepare for emergency incidents



Photo provided

The Plant System Operations hub doubles as the Incident Command Center during an actual emergency, in which the Incident Commander will manage the incident within the bounds of the Emergency Management Plan.

The Department of Energy Office of Environmental Management and CH2M HILL BWXT West Valley, its cleanup contractor at the West Valley Demonstration Project, recently conducted a full-scale exercise that included Cattaraugus County Sheriff's Department, Cattaraugus County Special Response Team, Cattaraugus-Chautauqua Bomb Squad, West Valley Volunteer Hose Fire and Rescue and evaluation assistance from Cattaraugus County Emergency Services. This exercise, which was based on a hypothetical incident, tested the skills and response of these local agencies as well as the site's Radiological Controls Department, Environmental Department, Emergency Medical Response Team, Security Force and Operational Response Team.

It's been stated that during an emergency, you always fall back on your training. Disasters can occur at any time, and a knowledgeable, well-trained emergency response team can significantly improve the outcome of any event – exercises provide this real-world training. Exercises also provide constructive feedback to improve in areas identified during the course of the incident. This full-scale exercise, held at the WVDP site and New York State retained premises, was designed to validate the team's response to an unannounced hypothetical incident and their ability to minimize the potential impact to the employees, the public and the environment.

"You can never over plan for emergencies," CH2M HILL BWXT West Valley Event and Emergency Management Manager Kevin Murray said. "To be prepared in our field, you must always be learning, training, and evaluating your performance. I know we can't predict the future, but we can certainly be well-prepared for whatever comes our way."

DOE-WVDP staff and WVDP personnel helped develop the scenario and supported the exercise as controllers and evaluators. This included coordinating the many tasks that had to occur to make it more realistic and truly test responders from beginning to end. There were five DOE-HQ observers that assisted the DOE-WVDP with evaluations. In

all, there were more than 25 law enforcement and 10 fire and emergency medical service participants from offsite agencies, with assistance from Argonne National Lab's Mock Media Team who provided hypothetical social media and news coverage.