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Bembia honored for work in West Valley

ALBANY—For his time with New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and serving at the West Valley Nuclear Site for over 20 years, Director Paul Bembia was honored with an award for his accomplishments.

Bembia was awarded the 2018 Public Service Excellence award by the New York State Academy for Public Administration at a ceremony in Albany on May 21. Chosen from a statewide pool of nominees, the award recognizes outstanding public servants throughout New York government.

“It is a great honor for my public service to be recognized with such a prestigious award,” Bembia said.

Working with NYSERDA, the organization charged with stewardship of the cleanup at the West Valley Demonstration site, Bembia helped provide leadership and guidance throughout major transitions and cleanup efforts, managed interactions with state and federal regulators, coordinated with local and tribal governments and helped assure day-to-day public safety of the site’s employees.



“One of the great experiences in working with government is if you are lucky, you meet more good people like [Bembia],” NYSERDA General Council Noah Shaw said at the ceremony. “Committed to mission, selfless, expert, savvy and with the broad perspective on the trajectory of issues that have challenged generations before us and will likely face generations after us. Thank you ... for your service to the State of New York.”

Throughout his years working in West Valley, seeing the progress of the cleanup of the West Valley Nuclear Site and being able to help residents both locally and across the state is why Bembia loves his job as he continues to make even more progress.

“It’s been fascinating, it’s been great to see the progress that we have made on the cleanup, and I think some of the most rewarding work for me is ... to continue to work to make New York state the best place it can be for its residents and also it’s been a pleasure to meet so many great people in the community,” he said.

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Whether it's working with the nuclear site, helping the town board look at its options for a proposed solar farm or working with other groups and organizations within Ashford, Bembia has had a major impact on the community and many are appreciative of his contributions.

"When [Bembia] took over the leadership of the NYSERDA group in West Valley, [he became] involved with the school, the chamber, the town and that is a presence we didn't see before," Ashford Supervisor Charles Davis said. "I can't think of anybody, any state worker that would be more deserving of this award."

Looking to the future, completing the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the West Valley Site and being able to set a direction for phase two of the cleanup is what Bembia hopes to accomplish for the people in West Valley he has grown to love.

"I've been here almost 28 years and I'm here almost every single day and I truly enjoy working with folks in the community, meeting everyone in the community and I think it's an absolutely beautiful area," Bembia said. "I have a special place in my heart for the West Valley community."

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Another phase completed at WVDP

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WEST VALLEY—Moving through the process of demolishing the vitrification facility at the West Valley Demonstration Project, workers removed a process crane earlier this month. Crews can now continue work associated with the project, now in phase two.

The process crane, weighing 38,000 pounds, was successfully removed from the vitrification facility by utilizing lessons learned from the safe removal of the cell's four coolers, extensive planning, engineering controls and historical best practices.

“Using lessons learned and a deliberate approach are one of the best combinations for safety and success,” CHBWV President Jeff Bradford said. “They continue to complete the demolition of the vitrification facility in a safe and compliant manner.”

WVDP Director Bryan Bower applauded the team for the “excellent” job in both planning and execution of the work.



“This paves the way for the safe continuation of the vitrification facility demolition,” he said.

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Crews sprayed a fixative to the crane for additional contamination controls, prior to the removal, then used a large excavator with a hydraulic hammer to break away the crane rails on both sides to free the crane from its location. Switching to another large excavator with a grapple attachment, the crane and its hoists were lowered to the floor of the vitrification facility, where crews then performed additional contamination controls. The crane was size reduced for packaging and shipping based on size, dose rates and weight.

The vitrification facility produced 278, 10-foot-tall canisters of vitrified high-level waste between 1996 through 2002. It was one of only two vitrification facilities to operate in the United States. The facility contains radiological and hazard contaminants as a result of HLW vitrification activities.

The facility's process crane was used to handle canisters throughout the vitrification cell. Full canister handling was a high-level waste activity. The process crane is a twin 4.5 ton hoist-trolley mounted on a bridge. The twin hoists were mounted 32 inches from each other on a turntable which allowed the hoists to rotate 359 degrees. This allowed the hoists to reach closer to the vitrification cell walls than would be possible with only a single hoist, and also made load orientation possible.