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## Former Tennessee uranium enrichment complex marks cleanup milestone

By Vivian Jones | The Center Square



U.S. Secretary of Energy Dan Brouillette speaks at an event marking the historic cleanup milestone of the former K-25 site at the East Tennessee Technology Park in Oak Ridge, Tenn.

Vivian Jones / The Center Square

(The Center Square) – Deconstruction and cleanup of the first former uranium enrichment complex in the world is complete, U.S. Secretary of Energy Dan Brouillette announced Tuesday at an event marking the historic cleanup milestone of the former K-25 site at the East Tennessee Technology Park in Oak Ridge.

Built secretly in the 1940s as part of the Manhattan Project, the campus once was home to a complex of facilities that enriched uranium for the world’s first atomic weapon. From 1945 to 1985, the plant produced enriched uranium for commercial nuclear power. The U.S. Department of Energy closed the site in 1987, and facilities fell into a dangerous state of disrepair.

“We turned what was once an expensive government liability that presented risks to the community into an asset that the community can use to usher in new growth for East Tennessee,” Brouillette said.

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Cleanup of the area began in the early 2000s, led by the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management in partnership with its cleanup contractor, UCOR. The effort cost about \$4.5 billion in federal appropriations over the life of the project. Federal funds also supported state oversight of the program by the Tennessee government.

During the process, more than 500 deteriorated and contaminated buildings were removed – about the footprint of about 225 football fields. With the completion of the project, 2,200 acres are available for economic development and recreation.

The DOE's Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management was able to complete the work four years ahead of schedule, saving taxpayers an estimated \$80 million in cleanup costs and \$500 million in environmental liabilities.

“Under budget and under time rarely occur independently, and they even more rarely occur both at the same time,” Gov. Bill Lee said in his remarks. “And for that to happen in a project like this that's never been done before in this country is, to me, an example, not only is the hard work that's been done here but the, the spirit that can only be accomplished with American exceptionalism.”

“The contractor and managers did such a good job of finishing early under budget – it saves hundreds of millions of dollars and we can now move more quickly to begin to clean up the mercury on the Y-12 project,” U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander said, noting the adjacent facility awaiting cleanup. “The fact that the Oak Ridge team has done this so well, so rapidly, is a big help to the taxpayer.”

The campus is available for a multiuse industrial park. An education center about the K-25 site's involvement in Manhattan Project and Cold War operations preserves the legacy of the site for future generations.

“I've been to Hanford. I've been to West Valley. I've been to all of those sites, and I'm telling you right here, it's done differently – and it's a remarkable accomplishment,” Brouillette said. “I don't know of any other place within the DOE complex that operates as efficiently and as effectively as right here in Oak Ridge.”