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Employee Feedback Improves Decontamination Project at West Valley



Mark Hebdon, a maintenance mechanic and fabricator with CH2M HILL BWXT West Valley, stands next to a containment box that was modified to incorporate employee feedback for improved safety, productivity, and efficiency.

WEST VALLEY, N.Y. – [EM](#) workers provided feedback and lessons learned to help develop a new box to contain materials for disposal as they decontaminate the walls of a former reprocessing cell inside the Main Plant Process Building at the [West Valley Demonstration Project](#) (WVDP).

“This is a good example of what can be accomplished when employees are engaged in the process,” said Todd Olson, facility disposition foreman with EM cleanup contractor CH2M HILL BWXT West Valley. “Open communication allows for ideas to be shared and provides a sense of ownership, which helps to further improve safety, productivity, and efficiency.”

EM workers built the containment box at WVDP for use in the cleanup work set to begin next month with new COVID-19 protocols. They will use liquid nitrogen — up to 60,000 pounds per square inch — to clean the nearly 2,400-square-foot surface of the walls in the cell and dispose of debris from the work in the containment box.

“This safe method possesses several advantages, including removal efficiency, waste minimization, and versatility over other traditional decontamination methods including water, carbon dioxide, and decontamination gels,” Olson said.

WVDP employees have been providing input to enhance the efficiency and safety of the project since January of last year. The latest changes to the containment box include an improved viewing area for operators, better lighting, and a narrower design for reaching tight spaces. Lessons learned from each worker entry into the cell are being incorporated into future improvements.

The former reprocessing cell is located inside the south end of the Main Plant Process Building. The cell contained equipment used to purify plutonium product. That work was completed by Nuclear Fuel Services, which reprocessed spent fuel at the site from 1966 to 1972.

The Main Plant Process Building is set to be demolished later this year.

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