

## Concerns expressed over open-air demolition at West Valley

By Rick Miller

Members of West Valley Citizens Task Force are expressing concern over the U.S. Department of Energy's plans for the open-air demolition of the main process plant at the **West Valley Demonstration Project**.

Two local members of the CTF, formed in 1996 as a watchdog for the cleanup of the former plant that reprocessed spent nuclear fuel, said that the community is also concerned that radioactivity could escape during demolition.

CTF members asked for more information from the DOE at Wednesday's meeting to be able to judge whether the DOE's demolition plans are sufficient.

An earlier proposal to demolish the main process plant, which still contains some radioactive "hot spots," called for it to be covered to keep water from infiltrating the structure and contain any radioactive dust. That would have added to the cost, however, and DOE opted for open-air demolition.

"There's a lot of concern about the main process building demolition," said longtime Task Force member John Pfeffer of West Valley. "We need to see the (radioactivity) characterization and see the (demolition) plan."

Joe Petti, another CTF member, agreed that the community "is very concerned with the open-air demolition." He suggested tenting some of the "hot areas."

Officials from nuclear cleanup contractor CHBWV, including deputy general manager Kelly Wooley, said the task of characterizing the radioactive waste in the different parts of the main process building has been delayed due to COVID-19 protocols.

Workers are removing layers of contamination from the walls and floor of Product Purification Cell South through a process called nitrocission. A high pressure spray removes the surface of the concrete that contains radioactivity. It is then removed from the cell and stored for proper disposal.

The radiation levels will be measured after the layers of contamination that did not penetrate the concrete are removed. Bryan Bower, DOE site director, said the surveys are needed "to make sure we're getting the contamination we need to remove."

Removing as much of the contamination inside the cells before demolition and spraying a paint fixative to adhere to the surface reduces the amount of radioactivity that could be contained in dust, officials said.

Joseph Pillittere, a spokesman for CHBWV, said a community outreach will be scheduled to explain the demolition after the entire Main Process Building is characterized by measuring radioactivity and reporting it to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

DOE officials do not see the open air demolition beginning in late summer or early fall.

Pfeffer, the longtime CTF member said he and the rest of the CTF had agreed back in 1998 that they wanted the site completely cleaned up — "to get it out of here as safely as possible with nothing to remain."

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Everything includes the empty steel tanks that still contain radioactivity, the strontium contamination in the groundwater beneath the Main Process Building and the state and NRC burial sites adjacent to the **WVDP** site. Everything.

Ray Vaughn, another founding CTF member, agreed. From the outset, members wanted the site cleaned up.

Pfeffer said two recent major rain events in the area of the site were examples of climate change that could impact the site, which drains into Cattaraugus Creek.

Eric Wohlers, the Cattaraugus County Health Department's environmental health director and another CTF founding member, said, "The site is still not suitable for long-term storage.

"What are we going to do with the buried waste in the SDA and NDA? Eventually, this is going to have to come out and go somewhere," he said.