

The Bradford Era

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West Valley resumes shipping wastes by rail



The first rail cars leave the West Valley Demonstration Project with soils and structure materials as part of the ongoing cleanup efforts at the site.

WVDP photo

By RICK MILLER Special to The Era

WEST VALLEY, N.Y. — Shipments by rail of hazardous material and some low-level radioactive waste have resumed at the [West Valley Demonstration Project](#).

The nuclear cleanup at the nation's only commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing center in the town of Ashford has been ongoing since the early 1980s.

It is overseen by the U.S. Department of Energy and the [New York State Energy Research and Development Authority](#).

Sixty-eight buildings have now been demolished and removed from the site to safe storage and disposal sites. Much of that waste was shipped by truck.

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Recently, the Department of Energy and the Buffalo & Pittsburgh Railroad completed upgrades to the railroad track at the site and along the B&P line south from the plant.

“The resumption of rail shipments signals a new beginning for the WVDP and will bring many benefits to the future cleanup of the site,” WVDP Director Bryan Bower said. “This work today will help accelerate decommissioning and remediation activities in the very near future.”

Currently being shipped offsite is soil excavated from a trench installed more than a decade ago to intercept groundwater contaminated with strontium 90. Crews are excavating the material in the trench, placing it in intermodal containers and moving it to rail cars.

Joseph Pillittere, a spokesman for CHBWV, the contractor carrying out the cleanup at West Valley, said the soil excavated from the trench was stored on the ground and covered. That is being removed, stored in sealed intermodal containers and taken to the rail cars for removal from the site. The soil is considered low-level waste.

The clay-like, absorbent zeolite material, which strips radioactivity from the water containing strontium 90, remains in the trench, Pillittere said.

The Department of Energy plans to use rail cars to remove debris from the Main Plant Process Building, where open air demolition could begin as early as December.

The Department of Energy removed 278 canisters of vitrified high-level waste from the Main Plant Process Building and placed into vertical storage casks that are stored outside waiting for an approved high-level waste repository site.

Demolition and waste disposition of the Vitrification Facility were completed in September 2018 and January 2019, respectively.

The deactivation of the Main Plant Process Building continues, and is 91 percent complete. The DOE continues to package and ship low-level waste from the WVDP site.

The waste includes:

- 2.4 million cubic feet of low-level waste have been shipped off-site for disposal.
- Seven miles of piping and over 50 tons of vessels and equipment have been removed from predominantly high-hazard areas of the former reprocessing plant.
- 36,000 square feet of asbestos-containing material was removed from the former reprocessing plant.
- 278 waste containers of vitrified high-level radioactive waste were removed from the storage cell in the former reprocessing plant, loaded into 56 vertical storage casks, and stored onsite awaiting a permanent repository.
- 24 million curies of radioactivity were solidified in 600 tons of glass contained in 275 stainless steel canisters.
- More than 28,000 cubic feet of transuranic waste (from the original reprocessing) that are stored onsite pending availability of an off-site disposal facility.