

West Valley resumes waste shipments by train following upgrades to rail line



Photo provided

Workers begin the process of loading soil that was excavated when installing the site's permeable treatment wall.

The Department of Energy and its cleanup contractor at the **West Valley Demonstration Project** has resumed the use of a rail line to ship waste offsite this month.

“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.”

WVDP worked with the Buffalo-Pittsburgh Railroad Administration to rehabilitate the **Western New York Nuclear Service Center** rail spur and BPRR's main line.

Shipping the waste by rail enhances safety by removing potential hazards such as vehicle traffic associated with completing the shipments via truck. Train shipments also increase efficiency by allowing more material to be shipped compared to trucking. The train shipments also cost less than truck shipments, saving taxpayer dollars.

“Our employees and subcontractors did an excellent job in getting the rail line ready for shipments,” Linda Michalczak said, CH2M HILL BWXT West Valley projects manager. “This accomplishment speaks volumes on the importance of solid communication, teamwork and best practices.”

Among the waste to be shipped by rail is an estimated 108,000 cubic feet of soil that had been removed to make way for a unique groundwater treatment system constructed years ago. A structure used to store that soil also will be shipped for disposal by train. This project plans to ship approximately 400 intermodal containers of the material from **West Valley**.

The groundwater treatment system, known as a permeable treatment wall, was installed to mitigate a groundwater plume that originated from historical releases at the site’s main plant process building. The wall, which will remain in place, is an approximately 785-foot-long trench that contains nearly 2,000 metric tons of zeolite, a naturally occurring mineral formed from volcanic ash. The zeolite strips the contaminant strontium-90 from the groundwater passing through the wall.

The rail line will also be used to ship waste generated by the future demolition of the main plant process building. Beginning demolition of that facility is a Department of Energy Office Of Environmental Management EM priority for 2021.