

Demolition underway at WVDP

- By Rick Miller, County Reporter
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Demolition has begun on the vitrification facility at the West Valley Demonstration Project in the town of Ashford. The facility operated from 1996 to 2002 to solidify 600,000 gallons of high-level radioactive liquid waste. The demolition is scheduled to be completed in April 2018. Submitted photo

WEST VALLEY — Demolition has begun on a major building at the West Valley Demonstration Project, site of the federal-state cleanup at the first commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in the United States.

The vitrification facility, where more than 600,000 gallons of radioactive liquid waste were processed into glass that filled 275 stainless steel containers, started coming down on Sept. 11. It operated between 1996 and 2002.

The stainless steel containers with radioactive glass logs are now stored in 56 concrete casks on a nearby concrete pad.

The demolition is a systematic process that will take several months, according to a spokesman for contractor, CH2M HILL BWXT West Valley LLC. It is scheduled to be completed by April 2018.

“It’s been a long time coming,” spokesman Cynthia Dayton, of CH2M HILL’s communications department told the Olean Times Herald Monday. “We’re all excited.”

On Thursday afternoon, officials from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), CH2M HILL BWXT West Valley and others will participate in a ceremony marking the milestone in the cleanup.

The program will be held under a tent set up in the parking lot, with a view of the 10,700 square-foot vitrification facility. The open house for employees and invited guests will include a planned 15-minute view of demolition.

Outside steel walls on the east and west sides of the 50-foot-tall building were the first to fall to two large excavators on Sept. 11. Much of the building's interior consists of reinforced concrete.

"The start of demolition is a significant accomplishment for the CHBWV team and the U.S. Department of Energy," said Bryan Bower, West Valley director for the DOE. "The WVDP is the first site in the DOE complex to design, construct, operate, shut down — and now demolish — a vitrification facility."

Bower noted the WVDP workforce's vitrification experience has proven a valuable asset for the DOE, which operates another vitrification facility at the Department's Savannah River Site in South Carolina.

"Some of the very people that helped construct and operate the vitrification facility are now supporting its demolition," Bower said.

The nuclear fuel reprocessing plant operated from 1966 to 1972, processing 640 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel rods. Nuclear Fuel Services walked away from the plant in 1972 after closing for plant upgrades that became too expensive for the plant to be profitable. Under contract, the company turned the 2,000-acre site over to the state — radioactive waste and all.

The West Valley Demonstration Project Act of 1980, was passed by Congress and signed into law by Pres. Jimmy Carter. So far, \$2.9 billion in state and federal funds have been spent on the cleanup.

"Extensive preparations were completed inside the facility prior to commencement of demolition, including removing vitrification process components, piping and hazardous materials, performing surface decontamination, isolating mechanical and electrical systems and sealing penetrations to prevent contamination migration during demolition," according to a press statement. "The demolition plan and safety precautions were extensively reviewed prior to receiving approval to proceed with demolition."

Debris is being loaded into waste containers soon after it is generated to minimize debris piles, and is being shipped off-site to a federal low-level waste disposal facility. Water is being used to spray the building to keep dust down.

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