

Nuclear Power Industry News

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NRC Finishes Review Of DOE's Phase 1 Decommissioning Plan For West Valley Demonstration Project

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- Source NRC -

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has concluded its technical review of the Department of Energy's Phase 1 decommissioning plan for the West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP) in western New York state. The NRC did not identify any objections and concluded that the plan will satisfy the decommissioning criteria for unrestricted use spelled out in NRC regulations.

The West Valley site is located on 3,300 acres of land known as the Western New York Nuclear Service Center. The WVDP site, which is a 200-acre portion of the center, contains a former commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing facility that operated from 1966 to 1972, and produced approximately 600,000 gallons of liquid high-level radioactive waste. The WVDP also contains contaminated structures and a radioactive waste disposal area. The site also has a waste tank farm, waste lagoons, and above-ground radioactive waste storage areas, with soil and groundwater contamination near these facilities.



DOE's Phase 1 decommissioning plan envisions remediation activities within the WVDP site boundary, including removal of the main plant process building, the vitrification facility, source area of the North Plateau groundwater plume, wastewater treatment facility lagoons, and ancillary buildings, foundations, slabs and pads. Phase 1 activities would also include additional characterization of site contamination and studies to support the technical approach to complete site decommissioning.

Through the West Valley Demonstration Project Act of 1980, Congress gave NRC authority to review and consult with DOE informally on certain matters related to the project. In a subsequent memorandum of understanding, the two agencies agreed that NRC would review and comment on DOE's decommissioning plan, and that DOE would review and consider NRC's comments before initiating Phase 1 decommissioning activities.

Phase 2 decommissioning of the remainder of the WVDP and center, or its long-term management, will be determined in the future and are not part of this decommissioning plan.

The NRC's Technical Evaluation Report on the Phase I decommissioning plan, as well as NRC's letter to DOE transmitting the report, are available in the NRC's Agencywide Documents Access and Management Systems (ADAMS) under accession number ML100360030. ADAMS is accessible via the agency's Web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. Help in using ADAMS is available by contacting the NRC's Public Document Room at 1-800-397-4209 or 301-415-4737, or by e-mail at PDR.Resource@nrc.gov.

Published Mar 04 2010, 08:13 AM by [steveheiser](#)

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OLEAN TIMES HERALD

News:

Friday, March 19, 2010 7:10 PM EDT

New safety procedures in place after building shut down because of asbestos

By Rick Miller
Olean Times Herald

WEST VALLEY – Part of the Main Process Building at the West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP) was closed off late last month after workers removing asbestos-coated pipes discovered the flakey material had become dislodged from pipes outside a containment area.

John Chamberlain, a spokesman for West Valley Environmental Services, the consortium of companies involved in the cleanup at the West Valley Demonstration Project, said Thursday that the incident was reviewed by company officials and new safety protocols are now in place.

The fourth floor of the five-story Main Process Building was shut down for two weeks as cleanup crews cleaned up the area where the asbestos-laden insulation around the pipes appeared to crumble into the air from vibrations from the pipe being cut into pieces in an area contained by plastic sheeting. The containment areas typically filter air to prevent the spread of asbestos and trained employees wear equipment approved for asbestos removal.

Mr. Chamberlain said about 10 workers were working in the area.

"Evaluations were done and a plan developed on how work would proceed to ensure containment of asbestos as removal jobs continue," he said.

The crews removing the pipes are now using a different cutting method to lessen the vibrations along the pipe outside the area contained in plastic, Mr. Chamberlain said. Areas just outside containment areas will routinely be sampled as a precaution, he added.

Cattaraugus County Legislator Charles Hebdon of West Valley said he had heard from workers at the plant that an asbestos problem had closed down the area where the pipe was being removed in the Main Process Building for a couple of weeks. He said he had been assured by officials that it was an isolated incident.

Mr. Chamberlain said the incident occurred Feb. 27 as a crew was removing pipes and ducts while another crew was removing vents on the fourth floor. Once the pipe within the contained area was removed, the crew performed an air test outside the work area and discovered some airborne asbestos.

He said the level of asbestos was below that of the Occupational Safety and Health Agency's (OSHA) standards for safety, but above the level necessary to issue a blanket clearance for the area.

"They disturbed some asbestos. There were no employee issues," he said. "We closed down the fourth floor for a couple of weeks to clean up everything."

In addition, safety officials put a plan together to check areas adjacent to asbestos removal areas and to lessen vibrations along pipe which is believed to have contributed to the asbestos release.

Initially, the Department of Energy was going to leave much of the asbestos in the 50-year-old Main Process Building, demolish it and cover the debris. That plan was shelved and the asbestos is now being removed prior to demolishing the building and removing it from the site in the town of Ashford.

The building, where spent nuclear fuel rods were once cut up and bathed in acid as part of a process to recover plutonium, has miles of pipe inside it that has to be removed. Cells with high levels of radioactivity are being cleaned and equipment is being cut up and removed.

No radioactive material was involved in the Feb. 27 incident, Mr. Chamberlain emphasized.

Before the building is demolished, however, a new shielded building must be constructed to store 275 steel-encased radioactive glass logs 10 feet high and 3 feet in diameter. These are now housed in the Main Process Building.

Demolishing the building will gain access to the source of a radioactive liquid that pooled beneath the building and is inching underground toward one of the creeks that run through the site.

(Contact reporter Rick Miller at rmiller@oleantimesherald.com)

Peace walkers march through region

By Rich Place
Special to the Olean Times Herald



SALAMANCA

- Waving flags and beating drums, about two-dozen peace walkers marched from Salamanca to Ellicottville on Monday during the third day of their 57-day journey across the state.

The walk, which was initiated by the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Order, began during an opening ceremony Saturday in Steamburg. It will end after a 706-mile march to New York City in time for the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference at the United Nations.

On Sunday, the group marched from Steamburg to Salamanca, and Monday's walk took marchers from Salamanca to Ellicottville. Later this week, the group will stop at the West Valley Nuclear Waste Site to protest the nuclear waste buried there.

In addition to West Valley, the march from Western New York to New York City will visit six nations of Native American territories, because the marchers believe, according to a handout they prepared, that "historically and currently, the native communities ... bear a disproportionate burden of risk from the nuclear fuel cycle."

The walkers are also scheduled to visit a National Guard base in Syracuse, which is soon to be home to MQ-9, the first hunter-killer unmanned aerial vehicles, and the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant between Albany and New York City. The march will end May 2 at a national rally at the United Nations, as the UN is scheduled to review the treaty the following day.

"We do try and explain why we are walking," Jules Orkin, one of the walkers, said. "People do learn from us. We are an odd sight coming down the road with flags and banners and drums and so forth, and that's the awareness that we raise. People ask, 'What are these people doing?'"

Mr. Orkin said that of the 25 people who marched from Salamanca to Ellicottville on Monday, seven of them were from Japan (where the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Order originated), four of them were ordained monks and ministers, two were Native Americans and one person was from France. The marchers ranged in age from 15 to 71, Mr. Orkin said.

After walking 10 to 18 miles each day, which is planned out ahead of time, members of the group may spend time talking about their views to members of the community where they will spend the night.

"Generally the community where we stay will offer a potluck dinner, and maybe the people from the church or (or others) will come and we'll talk," Mr. Orkin said. "It's not a program, it's more of a community meeting."

Mr. Orkin said marchers will spend the night in churches with sleeping bags they carry during the day.

The main goal of the marchers is a nuclear-free future, and they will spread their message on every mile of the march.

"We may not accomplish that this year," Mr. Orkin said. "But we keep trying."