

Train removes first cars of debris from West Valley Main Plant Building



Photo provided

An engineer hooks up an intermodal container with debris from the start of demolition of the Main Plant Process Building at the West Valley Demonstration Project. The first train with 12 cars left the WVDP facility in mid-October.

By Rick Miller

County Reporter

WEST VALLEY — A train with 12 containers of the first demolition debris from the Main Plant Process Building at the [West Valley Demonstration Project](#) in Ashford has been shipped off the site by rail.

Members of the West Valley Citizens Task Force learned of the milestone on Oct. 26 at the group's monthly meeting — the first since demolition material from the nuclear waste processing site has been shipped away.

Kelly Wooley, deputy manager for CHBWV, the contractor involved in the cleanup at [WVDP](#), showed members of the task force photos of the first days of the “deconstruction” of the Main Plant Process Building where 640 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel were processed from 1966 to 1972 to extract uranium and plutonium.

After the plant closed, Congress passed and President Jimmy Carter signed the [West Valley Demonstration Project Act of 1980](#). The cleanup began the next year and has continued for the past 40 years at a cost of more than \$3 billion so far. The [New York State Energy Research and Development Authority](#) looks after New York's interest and pays 10% of the cleanup costs.

No incidents involving the demolition of the Main Plant Process Building that led to a work stoppage were reported. If monitors for nuclear material around the demolition site are triggered, all activity will be stopped until the reason for a change in levels is determined.

The five-story building is constructed of reinforced concrete, some of which are 3 feet thick or more. In areas where there are still high levels of radioactivity in the walls, surfaces have been milled and coated with a blue fixative designed to bind to concrete.

Crews spent much of the past 20 years removing more than seven miles of contaminated piping and over 50 tons of contaminated equipment and other hazardous material like asbestos from the 35,100-square-foot facility. More than 98% of the radioactivity in the building has been removed.

The deconstruction is expected to take about 30 months. [WVDP](#) officials estimate it will take 1,500 intermodal containers loaded on rail cars to complete the project.

The demolition project further reduces environmental risks and positions the site for the next phase of the cleanup.

Demolition of the Main Plant Process Building to ground level will mark the end of Phase 1 of the cleanup.

Phase 2 studies are underway about what to do with radioactive material that remains in underground tanks and a plume of strontium 90 that starts at the Main Plant Process Building. The studies are along looking at state and federal low-level landfills adjacent to the [WVDP](#) site.

The rail spur inside the WVDP site and rails south of the site owned by Buffalo & Pittsburgh Rail Road were rehabilitated prior to using them to safely remove material from the Main Plant Process Building.

“The rail line is being used for the deconstruction of the Main Plant Process Building and future cleanup work at the site,” EM WVDP Main Plant Project Director Stephen Bousquet said. “This rail line represents a better method for waste disposition that’s safer and more efficient. It will help to accelerate remediation efforts in the future.”

Shipping the demolition waste by rail enhances safety by reducing vehicle traffic associated with completing the shipments via truck.

Train shipments increase efficiency by allowing more material to be shipped at once compared to trucking. The train shipments also cost less than truck shipments, saving taxpayer dollars, Bousquet said.

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