EM UPDATE
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West Valley Clears One Large Component After Another From Main Plant

An operator uses a fork truck to safely remove a vent washer from the west side of the Main Plant Process Building at the West Valley Demonstration Project.

WEST VALLEY, N.Y. – U.S. Department of Energy Office of Environmental Management (EM) (https://www.energy.gov/em/office-environmental-management) crews safely removed and packaged for disposal another massive component from the Main Plant Process Building recently as part of the facility's ongoing demolition at the West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP) (https://www.energy.gov/em/west-valley-demonstration-project-wvdp).

The vent washer weighed approximately 15,000 pounds and was approximately 7 feet wide, 20 feet long and more than 7 feet high. Its removal comes after EM crews successfully cleared the "Green Giant" (https://www.energy.gov/em/articles/west-valley-workers-pull-green-giant-main-plant) from the facility. Painted green decades ago, it was a system that held samples from various vessels used in former spent fuel reprocessing operations at West Valley. It weighed 1,100 pounds, with 75,000 pounds of steel and lead shield plates on the outside of it.

"The West Valley Demonstration Project team continues to make great progress in the demolition of the Main Plant as part of our cleanup efforts," Stephen Bousquet, EM West Valley assistant director of Project Management, said of the vent washer removal.

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The vent washer filtered airborne particulates from ventilated air before it passed through HEPA filters and was exhausted through the Main Stack during spent fuel reprocessing operations. The airborne particles originated from sawing and shearing of fuel rods and the ventilation flow from other cells and reprocessing equipment, including ventilation hoods in the Main Plant.

“This all comes down to deliberate speed and comprehensive planning,” Bousquet said. “Developing a comprehensive plan that defines the work, analyzes the hazards, develops controls, and utilizes feedback and lessons learned helped this evolution to be safe and successful."

The vent washer is one of more than 120 items at the Main Plant identified by EM requiring special handling and packaging for disposal.

Crews added a cement mixture known as grout to the vent washer to fix and stabilize internal contamination before pulling it from the Main Plant.

The vent washer was safely taken out of the Ventilation Wash Room through the Main Plant’s west wall. It was then placed in a custom-built waste package, bringing the total weight to more than 135,000. Moving that load posed a challenge to workers, but they did so safely and successfully through special rigging and material handling. The heavily shielded waste box will be disposed of at an offsite facility.

Scott Chase, deputy manager for Facility Disposition for EM cleanup contractor CH2M HILL BWXT West Valley (CHBWV), echoed Bousquet’s sentiment.

“This is the most physically challenging work at the site when you include radiological and industrial hazards, layers of protective clothing and limited mobility,” Chase said. “This crew used lessons learned and planning to enhance safety and improve efficiency. They put their collective knowledge into practice to complete this work evolution safely.”

The Main Plant is one of the last remaining major facilities at West Valley. Its successful demolition will further reduce environmental risks and position the site for the next phase in cleanup. The demolition is expected to be completed in fiscal year 2025.

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