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Dedicated employees have been key to WVDP demo process



West Valley Demonstration Project
Alex Steiner helps Steve Martin suit up in layers of protective clothing before entering the Main Plant Process Building work area.



West Valley Demonstration Project
Jeremy Adams helps Billy Bork suit up in layers of protective clothing before entering the Main Plant Process Building work area.

By JOSEPH PILLITTERE

Special to Olean Times Herald

WEST VALLEY — When you think of the word “demolition,” the first thing that you probably think of is a giant wrecking ball swinging into a building.

As young adults, we were enthralled by watching these types of demolitions on television or in our own communities. The biggest thrill was wanting to be the individual operating the heavy equipment. Operating heavy equipment and knocking down buildings was seen as being cool and fun to do for a living.

Fast forward to the present day and reality sets in — taking down buildings and structures with radiological, chemical and industrial hazards is no easy task. Those days of thinking this work was just cool and fun have now been replaced with work that is challenging, controlled and deliberate.

When taking down contaminated buildings or structures, you must work around heavy construction equipment, in areas with radiological, industrial and hazardous materials, in changing conditions and all sorts of weather.

If you ask any employee who is working on the deconstruction of the **West Valley Demonstration Project’s** Main Plant Process Building if this work is cool or fun, they will probably tell you it’s not, especially on days when difficult environmental conditions exist, or radiological conditions slow the work to a crawl.

However, as a management team, we hope they feel proud of what they accomplish daily and that it is admirable because they are reducing legacy risks for generations to come. These employees must endure many difficult conditions such as wearing multiple layers of protective clothing and respirators, which makes it more difficult to work.

In addition, they must work in all sorts of conditions and protect themselves from heat and cold-related hazards, rain, snow and wind. While there are methods for keeping employees cool, dry and warm depending on the season, it does not take away from the challenge of their work every day.

“Suiting up in multiple layers of protective clothing and working in all sorts of weather impacts everything,” said Maureen Cooney, CHBWV decommissioning and disposition (D&D) operator and 35-year employee. “There are several

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ways we try to minimize those impacts, but nothing is perfect. We need to be safe. That means being deliberate, diligent and aware of changing conditions at all times.”

D&D operator Greg Johnson an 11-year employee echoed Cooney’s sentiment.

“It’s challenging work but I would rather be doing this than anything I’ve done before,” he said. “This work is not for everyone, but it is very rewarding.”

Cooney and Johnson recalled working in the Product Purification Cell (PPC) before the deconstruction of the Main Plant. The PPC space — measuring 5 feet by 16 feet and 57 feet high — is located at the south end of the Main Plant. Considered a confined space, workers used nitrocision that employs liquid nitrogen at up to 60,000 psi to provide an aggressive, yet safe cleaning application to remove contamination from previous operations.

“Besides multiple layers of protective clothing with additional safety measures, we were also working in tight quarters,” said Cooney. “Through feedback, lessons learned and communication, we were able to perform the work safely.”

“Everything we did was focused on safety and watching out for each other,” Johnson added. “It took 45 minutes to suit up in order to enter the cell and perform work. After two to three hours, we would exit and remove our protective clothing. Throughout the whole time, we had coworkers keeping a watchful eye and ear open to provide support and help if needed. It was truly a team effort.”

If you ask Cooney and Johnson why they would put themselves through this, you would be surprised. Both prefer to be fully engaged and perform work directly. They also see this work as rewarding because the work helps to reduce legacy risks for future generations, including their own families.

“What’s being accomplished here, by this workforce, is to be commended,” said Tom Dogal, CHBWV facility disposition manager. “Everything that’s happened since the signing of the **West Valley Demonstration Project Act** has led to the deconstruction of the Main Plant, and our employees made it happen.”

Scott Chase, CHBWV deputy facility disposition manager, also praised the workforce for their efforts. “Every employee that has worked on this site since the **West Valley Act in 1980**, has contributed to the demolition of this building in some way,” he said.

Chase said the dedicated men and women, who are in the field every day, have helped to incorporate best practices and lessons learned from the **West Valley Demonstration Project** and across the DOE complex. These include the rate and sequence of the deconstruction, the use of engineered and robust safety controls including onsite and off-site monitoring, water management, waste management and personal protective equipment to protect workers, the public and the environment.

“Deconstructing buildings and structures has become almost a science with extensive planning, engineered controls, characterization, robust safety measures, specialized equipment and lessons learned,” Chase added.