

Major milestones for largest clean-up in the United States

On the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in southeastern Washington state, CH2M HILL Hanford Group is managing the biggest environmental cleanup project in the United States. As of late September, 2.5 million gallons of liquid radioactive wastes have been removed from older underground tanks, leaving 550,000 gallons to be removed by 2004.

Of the approximately 3 million gallons of liquid nuclear wastes, just over 1 million have been pumped out of older tanks between 1998 and last November. An additional 1.25 million gallons have been pumped out since.

There are 14 of 149 single-walled tanks that still contain some liquid wastes. Thirteen of those tanks are already being pumped, and work at the last tank is scheduled to begin this month.

The goal is to pump out all of the retrievable liquid remaining in single-walled tanks by Sept. 30, 2004.

The liquid wastes are pumped into newer and safer double-walled tanks. They will be stored there as work continues on a multibillion-dollar plant to convert those wastes into glass logs for eventual burial in Nevada. Groundbreaking for the plant took place mid-September.

Methods are being developed to retrieve the solid and sludge waste that remains in the single-walled tanks. In the meantime, removing the liquid portion to newer tanks reduces the risk to the public the nearby Columbia River and Hanford Site employees.



Hanford Nuclear Reservation occupies 560 square miles within the Columbia River basin. Since the early 1940s, nuclear fuel and materials have been produced at Hanford. Site activities have included plutonium production, advanced reactor design and testing, research and renewable energy technologies development.