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Hanford Vit Plant finishes 2009 with major accomplishments

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Richland, Wash. -- The Hanford Vitrification Plant finished 2009 with major accomplishments in three of its primary nuclear facilities -- the High-Level Waste (HLW) Vitrification Facility, Pretreatment (PT) Facility and the Low-Activity Waste (LAW) Vitrification Facility. These accomplishments included fabricating key equipment, placing a 36-ton rebar curtain and completing a support building, respectively.

"The Vit Plant reached 50 percent complete this fall, and we continue to make significant progress in all of our facilities," Rick Bradford, Vit Plant project manager, said. "We finished the year strongly in terms of engineering, construction, and, most importantly, safety, achieving the best safety record since the project's inception."

The first of two melter assemblies that will be installed in the HLW Facility was completed last month by custom-steel fabricator Petersen, Inc., in Ogden, Utah. The melters, central to the vitrification process, will be used to heat the waste mixture to high temperatures before it is poured into stainless steel canisters for permanent storage.

"These melters will be integral to the high-level waste treatment process and must meet strict nuclear-quality standards," Ty Troutman, area project manager for the HLW Facility, said. "This means extremely tight tolerances and precision engineering and fabrication. Our team worked with the vendor to overcome a myriad of challenges and complete the assembly as committed."

Each HLW melter measures approximately 14 feet long by 14 feet wide, stands about 12 feet tall and weighs 90 tons. Work has already begun on the second melter assembly, which is expected to be complete this spring.

Also last month, the PT Facility, the largest of the WTP facilities, continued to increase its prominence within the WTP skyline, as the last rebar wall curtain for the fourth elevation of concrete was placed. The fourth elevation raises the facility from 56 to 77 feet in height, and the massive curtain, measuring 21 feet by 51 feet and weighing more than 36 tons, will reinforce its concrete walls. The PT Facility will stand 120 feet tall and comprise a total of five concrete elevations.

"This, along with the ongoing upper-elevation concrete placements, structural steel erections and hot cell piping installations, continue to move the PT Facility from the civil construction phase to the mechanical, electrical and piping installation phase," Leon Lamm, area project manager for the PT Facility, said.

These accomplishments follow a milestone that occurred earlier this month, when the LAW Facility's switchgear building structure was signed off as complete. The structure will contain two switchgear units that will serve as the facility's main source of power. Combined, the two switchgear units distribute 5.3 megawatts of power. This is enough electricity to power nearly 1,800 standard residential homes, based on the assumption that 1,000 homes can be powered by 2 to 3 megawatts of power.

Cobra Roofing Services, Inc., a subcontractor to Bechtel National, Inc., completed the building's structure and installed some preliminary electrical equipment, such as power panels, conduit and lighting. Extensive lightning protection has also been installed. Equipment installation is expected to be complete this spring.

"Equipment is being procured, delivered and installed; the skyline is continually changing; and buildings are going up," Bradford said. "Each of these accomplishments advances Vit Plant construction and builds our momentum toward completion in 2019."



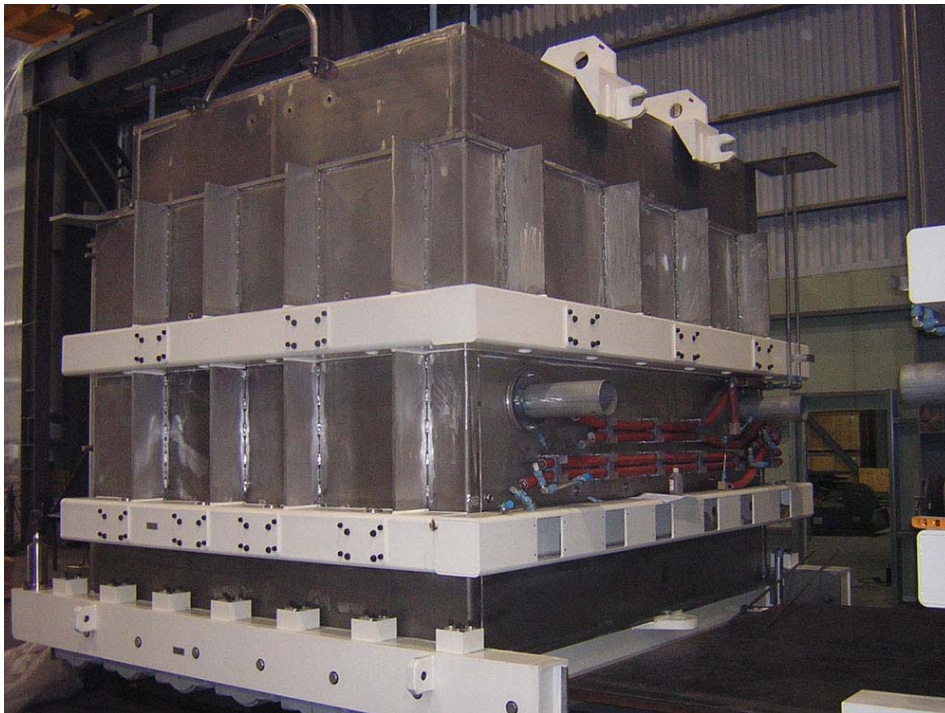
Bechtel National, Inc. is designing and building the world's largest radioactive waste treatment plant for the U.S. Department of Energy at the Hanford Site in southeastern Washington state. The \$12.2 billion Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant (WTP), also known as the Vit Plant, will immobilize the radioactive liquid waste currently stored in 177 underground tanks.

The WTP will cover 65 acres with four nuclear facilities -- Pretreatment, Low-Activity Waste Vitrification, High-Level Waste Vitrification and Analytical Laboratory -- as well as operations and maintenance buildings, utilities and office space.

Construction of the WTP began in 2001 and is now more than 50 percent complete. The plant will be operational in 2019.

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The high-level waste melters are integral to the waste treatment process and will be used to heat the waste mixture to 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit before it is poured into stainless steel canisters for permanent storage.



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The more than 36-ton rebar curtain was installed on the fourth elevation of the Pretreatment Facility. The fourth elevation brings the facility's height to 77 feet.



The Low-Activity Waste Vitrification Facility switchgear building (in the foreground) will serve as the facility's primary power source and will house enough electricity to power nearly 1,800 residential homes.