

Closure of the Rocky Flats Protected Area

The Rocky Flats Protected Area, shown in a 1998 photo before being reconfigured to surround only Building 371 in the foreground, consisted of a double perimeter fence and state-of-the-art intrusion and detection systems.

Description

Rocky Flats workers successfully packaged and shipped the last remaining quantities of weapons-usable plutonium and uranium at the site, allowing the closure of the site's Protected Area on August 8, 2003. Elimination of the Protected Area ends more than 50 years of high security and signals the beginning of the end of final cleanup work which is scheduled to be completed by December 2006.

Removal of all weapons-usable fissile materials and closure of the PA has been called the most significant accomplishment to date in the cleanup and closure of the site because it effectively ends Rocky Flats' original role in the nation's nuclear weapons production complex. Funding used to maintain the highest levels of security at Rocky Flats, estimated to be \$2 million each month, can be directed toward accelerated decontamination and decommissioning. Most importantly, the risks associated with weapons materials is eliminated. Risks include the potential for nuclear criticality, radiation exposure for workers required to handle the materials, and the threat of diversion by terrorists or countries interested in obtaining weapons-grade materials for use in nuclear weapons.

Removing all weapons-usable material from Rocky Flats was completed 12 years ahead of schedule and has been an on-going operation since cleanup began nearly 10 years ago.

In 1994, the U.S. Department of Energy released previously classified information that set Rocky Flats inventory of weapons-usable materials at approximately 21 metric tons. Plutonium consisted of metals, oxides, solutions and production scraps called residues. Enriched uranium consisted of metals and solutions. Also in 1994, a DOE study ranked two Rocky Flats buildings – Buildings 771 and 776 – as the most vulnerable plutonium-handling facilities in the weapons complex. Three other Rocky Flats buildings were in the top ten.

Early work by the Rocky Flats Field Office and its cleanup contractor, Kaiser-Hill Company, focused on the most urgent risks associated with plutonium and enriched uranium. Work involved repackaging plutonium, draining and processing liquids contained in tanks and process piping and stabilizing materials using a variety of processes. Shipping campaigns targeted the Rocky Flats inventory of pits, hemi-shells, alloys and parts – all part of weapons components produced by Rocky Flats since the plant began operation in 1953.

Security at Rocky Flats

Security has always been a cornerstone of Rocky Flats operations. The first structure on site was a small guard building constructed in May 1951 – excavation for construction of the first production building began two months later.

Because of heightened security concerns in the late 1970s, plans were made to install a \$5 million perimeter security zone surrounding the plutonium operations buildings. The perimeter security zone, when finished in 1983, consisted of a double-perimeter fence with closed-circuit television, alarms, and an uninterrupted power supply. Access to the area was controlled at three checkpoint guardhouses. In addition, four guard towers were installed along the inner fence. By 1985, a perimeter intrusion detection system was in place.

The Protected Area served as a concentric circle of security surrounding individual security zones, called Material Access Areas, within sensitive buildings.

An effort in the late 1990s to consolidate weapons-usable fissile materials from several locations within the protected area to just one, Building 371, allowed Kaiser-Hill to close several Material

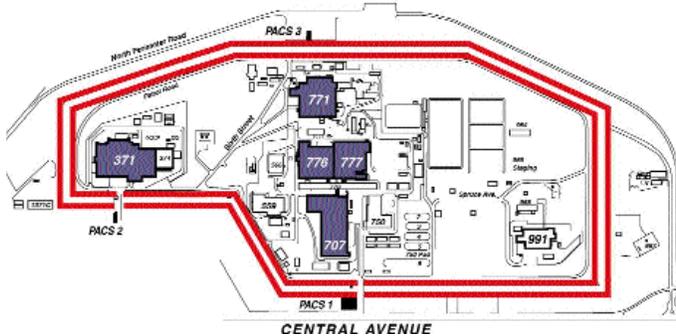
Access Areas and reconfigure the size of the Protected Area from approximately 180 acres to 30 acres. Protected Area reconfiguration resulted in significant cost savings that could be reinvested in closure work. In addition, it allowed work to decommission Rocky Flats 700-Area plutonium facilities to proceed on a greater scale because the most onerous security checks, including X-ray, metal detection, hand scanning, full vehicle searches and the requirement for a security clearance for unescorted access, were eliminated.

The Protected Area, Material Access Areas and plant Property Protection Area – essentially everything within access of the two guard checkpoints at the east and west gates, were managed by a highly competent protective force that routinely achieved the highest ratings during DOE inspections and evaluations.

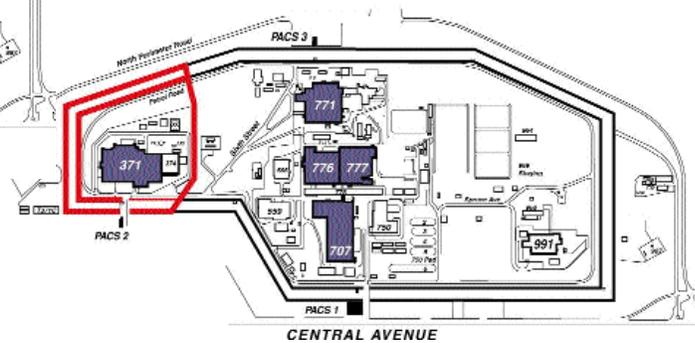
Security Still High

What remains at Rocky Flats still requires an appropriate level of protection and control. A large volume of radioactive material in the form of transuranic or low-level waste still remains at the site and will be addressed during the next few years of cleanup.

**Rocky Flats Protected Area
1983-2001**



**Rocky Flats Protected Area
2001-2003**



U.S. Department of Energy

Make It Safe. Clean It Up. Close It Down.



For further information about Rocky Flats

Contact DOE Communication at (303) 966-2006, or Kaiser-Hill Communication at (303) 966-2882.

Also, additional information about Rocky Flats is available on the internet at: <http://www.rf.doe.gov>