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03-02

Rocky Flats safely completes cleanup of the Solar Evaporation Ponds

GOLDEN, Colo., Feb. 4, 2003 – After nearly two decades of effort, Rocky Flats workers have completed final steps in the cleanup of the contaminated Solar Evaporation Ponds. The cleanup included the removal of nearly 800 tons of low-level and low-level mixed concrete and soil from the ponds.

At one time, the Solar Evaporation Ponds were perceived as a significant risk to public health. “Public safety is a key component of this remediation project and its completion represents a major milestone toward closure of Rocky Flats,” said Scott Surovchek, DOE program manager for the Solar Evaporation Ponds.

“This project demonstrates continuing progress in our efforts to safely accelerate the cleanup and closure of Rocky Flats,” said Denny Ferrera, Kaiser-Hill project manager for Remediation, Industrial D&D, & Site Services. “Our planning, preparation and extensive focus on hazard analysis is paying off.”

The Solar Evaporation Ponds at the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site were used from 1953 to 1986 to store and evaporate process waste water containing nitrates, treated acidic waste and low-level radioactive elements. Over time the ponds leaked contaminants into the groundwater in the area. The five ponds were emptied and nearly 400,000 gallons of sludge removed and packaged in 1995. A groundwater remediation system was installed in 1999.

The former Solar Evaporation Ponds covered nearly 10 acres. Remediation included removal of the supporting buildings and slabs, pump pads, process waste lines, sumps and valve pits. More than 60 truckloads of waste were hauled off site. The Solar Ponds were then filled with more than 65,000 yards of clean soil backfill and have been graded over. When the weather is favorable in March, clean topsoil will be added and reseeded will complete the remediation.

Rocky Flats is a DOE-owned cleanup and closure site operated by Kaiser-Hill Company under an accelerated closure contract. The Rocky Flats mission includes special nuclear material management and shipment, nuclear deactivation and decommissioning, waste management and shipment, environmental cleanup and site closure.