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Final shipment of plutonium in 2003 marks an end of an era for Rocky Flats

GOLDEN, Colo., February 3, 2004– The Rocky Flats Site continues to make significant progress toward final site cleanup and closure with approximately 80 percent of the closure project completed at the end of 2003.

“Rocky Flats made history in 2003,” proclaimed DOE Rocky Flats Manager Frazer Lockhart. “We packaged and shipped the last of the site's inventory of weapons-usable plutonium, ending 50-years of Rocky Flats' nuclear mission.” Lockhart added that the substantial progress achieved during 2003 puts the site on track to close no later than December 2006.

With the infrastructure in place to complete the job, Lockhart noted final closure issues are being resolved to successfully transfer the site to its new role as a Wildlife Refuge. Lockhart also noted the need to remain focused on working safely. “If we are going to successfully complete this project, we must maintain our safety vigilance. As the manager, I am committed to enhancing DOE's safety oversight role through the remainder of the project.”

Officials at the site agree that none of the accomplishments in 2003 could have been possible without the constant attention by safety of the workforce throughout the year. “I am extremely proud of the commitment of our workforce last year to maintaining a safe work environment,” said Kaiser-Hill President and CEO Alan Parker. “While we are encouraged by our performance last year, we will never be satisfied with our record.” Parker cited the inherent nuclear and industrial risks associated with the closure of Rocky Flats as evidence of the need for continued focus on safety.

The key accomplishments for 2003 include:

- Packaged and shipped all remaining weapons-usable plutonium and enriched uranium to other DOE Sites.
- Shipped more than 200 truckloads of radioactive and sanitary waste per week. For the fourth year in a row, Rocky Flats was the top shipper of transuranic waste in the Department of Energy (DOE) complex, disposing more than 4,000 cubic meters of waste in 2003 at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad, NM. This also was the fifth consecutive year of shipping more low-level radioactive waste than any other DOE site, disposing more than 66,000 cubic meters of waste in 2003. This demonstrates the magnitude of the Rocky Flats cleanup effort and the ability to remove these materials safely.
- Demolished 135 buildings and structures on site bringing the total number to 330 of 805.

- Completed remediation of the 903 Pad, the site's largest and most complex environmental cleanup project to date, removing 32,000 tons of plutonium-contaminated soil and asphalt.
- Dismantled the site's high security zone surrounding the plutonium buildings consisting of double perimeter fence with razor-sharp concertina wire, closed circuit televisions, motion detectors and guard towers.
- Removed more than 1,241 of 1,457 contaminated gloveboxes across the site to date, including all gloveboxes from Buildings 707, 776 and 771. All of the plutonium operations were performed within stainless steel enclosures called gloveboxes designed to protect the worker from radiation exposure.
- Launched an extensive work force transition program to assist site employees' transition from Rocky Flats when their role at the closure project is finished.

The project met or beat all regulatory milestones for 2003 under the Rocky Flats Cleanup Agreement (RFCA). The RFCA was negotiated by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy in 1996 to guide the cleanup effort. Under the agreement, milestones were established for each year to measure progress toward completion of the RFCA Vision and interim End State.

Rocky Flats is a Department of Energy-owned cleanup and closure site operated by Kaiser-Hill Company under an accelerated closure contract. The Rocky Flats mission includes the now-completed special nuclear material management and shipment, nuclear decontamination and building demolition, waste management and shipment, environmental cleanup and site closure.