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DOE breaks ground on new Mercury Treatment Facility

OAK RIDGE, Tenn. – Earlier today, lawmakers, environmental regulators, and top Department of Energy (DOE) officials broke ground on a new Mercury Treatment Facility at the Y-12 National Security Complex. When complete, the expansive complex will help reduce mercury levels in the East Fork Poplar Creek and enable large scale cleanup to begin at the site.

During the Cold War, Y-12 used mercury to perform some of its weapons development missions. Mercury flowed through pumps, pipes, valves and seals at high rates and sometimes escaped into the environment. DOE estimates approximately 700,000 pounds of mercury were released during that time.

“This project paves the way for critical infrastructure that will enable us to begin major demolition at Y-12,” said Jay Mullis, manager of DOE’s Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management. “We are incredibly grateful for the support we’ve received from our elected officials, and we are eager to get work underway to advance environmental cleanup at one of the nation’s most important national security sites.”

The Mercury Treatment Facility is a vital project for DOE’s Environmental Management program because it opens the door for the demolition of large, deteriorated, mercury-contaminated facilities by providing a mechanism to limit and control potential mercury releases. When operational, the facility will be able to treat 3,000 gallons of water per minute and include a 2 million gallon storage tank to collect stormwater.

The Mercury Treatment Facility will be comprised of two facilities that will be constructed in two separate areas. The headworks facility, which will capture water traveling from the western side of the site, will be built at Outfall 200 – the primary point where Y-12’s storm drain system discharges to create the headwaters of the Upper East Fork Poplar Creek. The water will then flow through a pipeline to the treatment facility that will be built on the eastern side of the site.

The groundbreaking marks the start of construction for the facility. DOE’s cleanup contractor, URS| CH2M Oak Ridge LLC (UCOR) has awarded a \$1.4 million contract to Knoxville-based GEM Technologies for site preparation work. Procurement is also under way for a contractor to perform the balance of construction, which is scheduled to begin in 2018.

UCOR, DOE's primary cleanup contractor for the Oak Ridge Reservation, will provide construction management support for the project. DOE anticipates operations beginning at the Mercury Treatment Facility in 2022.

"We are proud to be part of this new endeavor, which marks a key milestone in DOE cleanup transitioning from East Tennessee Technology Park to sites at Y-12 and the Oak Ridge National Laboratory," said Ken Rueter, UCOR President and Project Manager.

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