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August 30, 2016

Dept. of Energy completes decade-long project at Oak Ridge gaseous diffusion complex

Demolition marks a first in world history

Oak Ridge, Tenn. – Today, national, state, and local officials joined nearly 1,500 employees to watch the final wall of Building K-27 fall at the East Tennessee Technology Park, marking the first time in world history that all of a site's uranium-enrichment gaseous diffusion buildings have been cleaned and demolished. The celebratory event was titled "Enriching Our Future: A Historic Moment."

Among those in attendance were U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), U.S. Congressman Chuck Fleischmann (R-TN), U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management (EM) Dr. Monica Regalbuto, U.S. Environmental Protection Federal Facilities Restoration and Reuse Office Director Charlotte Bertrand, and Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Commissioner Bob Martineau.

"Today marks the end of an era, and I am extremely proud of the men and women who have worked here for more than a decade to complete the demolition of the uranium enrichment buildings and clean up the East Tennessee Technology Park," said Senator Lamar Alexander. "Oak Ridge is an example of how cleanup should be done—the Department of Energy, the contractors, and the local community working together to get a result and help bring new jobs to East Tennessee. More than 720 acres of land and 332,000 square feet of building space has been made available for new economic development leading to an estimated $100 million private investment in technology, industry, and renewables—helping to achieve the vision of the Oak Ridge Corridor."

The cleanup project is part of Vision 2016, a DOE goal to remove all of the former uranium enrichment buildings at the East Tennessee Technology Park by the end of 2016. K-27 was the fifth and final gaseous diffusion building to be demolished at the site. Successful demolitions of the four other buildings were completed from 2006 to 2015.

"The completion of Vision 2016 sets a standard for what is possible through a dedicated workforce and strong partnerships," said DOE's Oak Ridge Office of EM manager Sue Cange. "Its completion eliminates environmental hazards and makes 300 acres available for future development, creating opportunity for more innovation in a community already known for it."

As Oak Ridge's EM program finishes cleaning properties at the East Tennessee Technology Park, it is transferring those parcels to the City of Oak Ridge and the Community Reuse Organization of East Tennessee. Together, they are working to transform the site into a private-sector

brownfield industrial complex capable of creating hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars in capital investment for the region.

URS|CH2M Oak Ridge (UCOR) has served as DOE's cleanup contractor for the East Tennessee Technology Park since 2011. Since then, they have completed demolition of Building K-25's north tower and east wing, Building K-31, and now Building K-27.

"Today we have much to celebrate," said UCOR President and Project Manager Ken Rueter. "We completed Vision 2016 ahead of schedule and under budget, all while reaching nearly 7 million hours without a lost workday accident. I want to give a special thanks to the men and women of the workforce who have spent many years in the field performing their craft safely and diligently. It would not have been possible without them."

Oak Ridge first made history as center of operations for the Manhattan Project, established in 1942 to aid the war effort. K-25, a gaseous diffusion facility on a 2,200-acre site, was built to produce weapons-grade enriched uranium, which would fuel one of two atomic bombs that would end World War II.

In 1955, the K-25 complex had grown to include gaseous diffusion buildings K-25, K-27, K-29, K-31 and K-33 that comprised a multi-building production chain, and it was renamed the Oak Ridge Gaseous Diffusion Plant. Following shutdown of gaseous diffusion equipment at Oak Ridge in 1985, DOE began a major environmental cleanup effort at the site in 1987. In 1996, the Oak Ridge Gaseous Diffusion Plant was renamed the East Tennessee Technology Park.

With today's fulfillment of Vision 2016, DOE's Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management will continue to complete cleanup of the East Tennessee Technology Park and assist in transitioning it to the private sector, as well as focusing on additional cleanup operations at the Y-12 National Security Complex and Oak Ridge National Laboratory. The goal is to complete cleanup and transfer of the East Tennessee Technology Park by 2020.

As the final cleanup of the complex marks the start of a new era, the historic nature of its beginnings bears remembering:

- In 1945, the K-25 building was the world's largest with a 1.6 million square foot footprint and just under one mile from end to end; it employed 25,266 at its peak.

- The Oak Ridge Gaseous Diffusion Plant continued to produce enriched uranium during the Cold War, making technological advancements to further develop the gas centrifuge enrichment method, strengthening the U.S. nuclear defense program and helping the country win the Cold War.

- During the Cold War era, the Oak Ridge complex produced the fuel for the USS Nautilus (SSN-571), the world's first nuclear-powered submarine, and the world's first full-scale atomic electric power plant devoted exclusively to peacetime uses.

- In 1967, Oak Ridge Gaseous Diffusion Plant, in cooperation with the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, developed a centrifuge for producing ultra-pure vaccines that eventually were used for early batches of polio vaccine and the first large batches of purified influenza vaccine.

- After a post-war life supplying low-enrichment uranium for civilian power reactors, the final gaseous diffusion equipment at Oak Ridge was shut down in August 1985.

- Today, the footprint of the demolished K-25 Building is part of the Manhattan Project National Historical Park in Oak Ridge.

“DOE is proud to partner with UCOR for the final phase of this historic milestone, which sets the stage for the next chapter in this site’s history,” Cange said.

About the Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management
OREM’s mission is to remove environmental legacies resulting from more than 50 years nuclear weapons development and government-sponsored nuclear energy research. Specifically, it works to protect the region’s health and environment; ensure the Department of Energy’s vital missions in science, energy, and national security; and make clean land available for future use.

About UCOR
UCOR is the U.S. Department of Energy’s cleanup contractor at the East Tennessee Technology Park in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. For more information, visit http://www.ucor.com.

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