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DOE completes cleanup milestone that paves way for new economic development at East Tennessee Technology Park

OAK RIDGE, Tenn. – August 21, 2024 – The U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management (OREM) and its contractor United Cleanup Oak Ridge (UCOR) completed another key milestone in one of the nation’s largest environmental cleanup projects.

Congressional, state, and local leaders, along with private industry and officials from DOE and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), gathered earlier today at the East Tennessee Technology Park to celebrate the accomplishment.

The event highlighted crews finishing excavation of all the contaminated soil at the former Manhattan Project and Cold War-era uranium enrichment complex previously known as the Oak Ridge Gaseous Diffusion Plant, or K-25 Site. That work involved removing and disposing more than 554,000 cubic yards of soil, equaling nearly 50,000 dump truck loads.

This milestone signifies the completion of major fieldwork at the East Tennessee Technology Park, and it allows DOE to transfer the remaining federally owned parcels of land at the site to the community for beneficial reuse.

“Today is a significant and meaningful step toward completing our ultimate mission at the East Tennessee Technology Park,” said OREM Manager Jay Mullis. “Our progress has transformed the site from an unusable liability into an economic asset for the Oak Ridge community.”

OREM and UCOR previously completed building demolitions at the site in 2020. That involved tearing down more than 500 structures with a combined footprint that could span 225 football fields. Since then, employees have been removing the foundation slabs and any impacted soil beneath them.

“As the prime contractor for both the East Tennessee Technology Park building demolition project and soil remediation, UCOR is proud of its role in providing continued benefit to the region as well as to the American taxpayer,” said Ken Rueter, UCOR President and CEO. “We are not only helping to restore the environment while reducing site risks, but we are also facilitating continued regional economic and recreational development.”

OREM's cleanup projects and land transfers have converted the East Tennessee Technology Park into a multi-use industrial park, national park, and conservation area.

"Today's milestone environmental cleanup announcement is a major achievement for Oak Ridge and East Tennesseans," said U.S. Representative Chuck Fleischmann. "I have long said that the government has a duty to Oak Ridge and communities across our country to clean up contaminated sites that date back to the Manhattan Project and the Cold War. By cleaning up and returning land to the people of Oak Ridge, the city can take this once unusable land and use it for a variety of purposes that will benefit the City of Oak Ridge, East Tennessee, and our entire state. As Energy and Water Appropriations Chairman, I will continue fully supporting the ongoing environmental cleanup work in Oak Ridge and nationwide."

To date, OREM has transferred more than 1,700 acres to the community to help attract and generate new economic development for the region, and it is transferring hundreds more acres in the coming year. 25 private businesses have located or announced plans to build on these parcels, bringing in \$1.35 billion in investments and generating an anticipated 1,400 jobs.

The focus of many of these recent industrial development efforts has been clean energy technology. Among those, Kairos Power began construction last month on its Hermes low-power demonstration reactor. The company's \$100 million investment will bring 55 jobs to the site. The landscape also features three solar array fields that provide renewable electricity to the grid.

This site's evolution has garnered this year's Superfund National Priorities List Award as part of EPA's annual National Federal Facility Excellence in Site Reuse Awards. The awards highlight the accomplishments of federal agencies, states, tribes, local partners, communities, and developers in restoring and reusing once-contaminated land at federal facilities.

"We are excited to announce that the East Tennessee Technology Park is one of this year's recipients of the National Federal Facility Excellence in Site Reuse Awards, recognizing the dedication and hard work on the part of our partner agencies and so many other people and organizations that went into remediating and transforming this site into a multi-use technology park that will benefit the community and the region," said Caroline Freeman, director of EPA's Superfund and Emergency Management Division in Region 4. "This is a remarkable achievement, and the first uranium enrichment complex in the world to be deactivated, demolished, and have soils remediated for reuse of the property."

EPA created the National Federal Facility Excellence in Site Reuse Awards to recognize exceptional work remediating a federal site for its beneficial use and creating positive impacts to the community.

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