Decommissioning of plant in West Valley is on track

By T.J. Pignataro
News staff reporter

WEST VALLEY — The building where the most highly radioactive materials at the West Valley Demonstration Project were once handled is being torn down.

The vitrification plant is where 900,000 gallons of liquid nuclear waste were turned into glass cylinders in the late 1950s and early 2000s. The cylinders were then packaged in cans and welded into steel canisters before being stored under 24-inch thick concrete casks and relocated to another spot on site.

In mid-September, contractors started peeling away the outside of the steel and sheet metal exterior of the building and the roof. That work wrapped up in early November, said West Valley officials.

"The (contractor) is making great progress with the safe completion of the first phase of this facility’s demo-lition," said Bryan Bower, project director for the U.S. Department of Energy. "This accomplishment allows our team to continue its work in the completion of site demolition activities."

West Valley was the nation’s only commercial nuclear reprocessing plant.

The waste was created when Nuclear Fuel Services operated the site between 1956 and 1972.

Some of the most radiologically toxic elements at West Valley include cesium, strontium, thorium and plutonium. Thorium-232 is its longest last-