

How long will work continue at WVDP under shutdown?

By Rick Miller Olean Times Herald | Posted: Monday, October 7, 2013 9:49 am

WEST VALLEY — Last Wednesday the president of the company charged with the cleanup at the West Valley Demonstration Project said decommissioning work was continuing at the site despite the federal government shutdown. Dan Coyne, president of CHBWV, the West Valley site contractor for the U.S. Department of Energy, told members of the Board of Health work was continuing on day two of the shutdown. There was some money remaining in the project's accounts after the federal fiscal year ended last Monday at midnight. The length of the shutdown and its impact on the Department of Energy budget could change things, Mr. Coyne explained. By Friday, day four of the government shutdown, the tone had changed. Mr. Coyne told the Times Herald he could not comment on whether the stalemate over the federal budget was impacting the cleanup, and referred questions to Bryan Bower, the Department of Energy director for the site. Mr. Bower said he too was barred from commenting on the shutdown's impact on the West Valley cleanup, and referred questions to the Department of Energy's Office of Public Affairs in Washington, D.C. A spokesman from the Public Affairs Office emailed a reply to a question about the shutdown's effect on the West Valley cleanup: "The Administration strongly believes that Congress can quickly come to a resolution to fund the work necessary to American people. This lapse in appropriations has serious impacts on the department's ability to carry out its mission. "As a result of the nature of DOE funding, the Department will be able to operate for a short period of time after Sept. 30. However, if a resolution is not achieved in the near term, the Department will be forced to take further action to shutdown nonessential operations, resulting in employee and contractor furloughs. "It is our hope that this will ultimately be unnecessary and that Congress will come to a quick resolution." The DOE public affairs spokesman did not address any specific questions regarding the shutdown and West Valley. It's likely that some essential Department of Energy employees, including Mr. Bower and his senior staff, remain at the cleanup site and DOE offices, off Route 219 in nearby Ashford Hollow. It's not known whether nonessential decommissioning activities by the contractor are continuing this week. Some regular monitoring is essential at the site and is presumably continuing.

The backfilling of an excavation at the south end of the West Valley Demonstration Project site continued last week during the shutdown. The excavation was for the foundation of a three-foot thick concrete pad 144 feet by 110 feet, that will be used to store 275 stainless steel casks 10 feet by 2 feet containing highly radioactive material encased in glass. Five canisters each will be stored in 56 multi-purpose canisters, which in turn will be contained in concrete vessels stored on the concrete pad. This week, hundreds of concrete trucks will be coming to the site to pour the concrete pad. It will be two or three years before the first canisters are removed from the main process building and onto the pad. All of the canisters must be removed and the storage cell decommissioned before the main process building can be demolished. Meanwhile, decommissioning in other parts of that building continue. The main process building was where Nuclear Fuel Services Inc., reprocessed spent nuclear fuel rod assemblies in the mid-1960s and early 1970s before it closed. Over the past 32 years, tax-payers have spent nearly \$2 billion on the cleanup, but much remains to be done, including decisions on what to do with buried tanks that held high-level liquid radioactive wastes — most of which was converted into the glass logs that remain in storage waiting for a federal high-level repository