

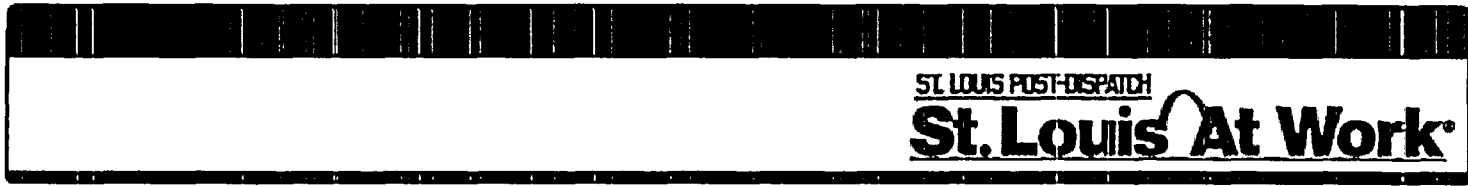
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Demolition of buildings at Hematite could start this year

By Tim Rowden
Of the Post-Dispatch
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Demolition of buildings could begin this year

Westinghouse Electric Co. could begin demolishing buildings at the company's shuttered nuclear fuel processing plant in Hematite later this year.

Officials with Westinghouse and the state Department of Natural Resources say the company is in the process of packaging 1,100 cubic yards of uranium-contaminated soil from the grounds of the former processing plant on Highway P west of Festus, and could begin dismantling buildings at the plant by this fall.

A public-comment period on the removal of the soil and proposed plans to dismantle buildings and equipment at the plant site ended last week.

Ben Moore, an environmental engineer and project manager for the department, said the state was requesting more detail on Westinghouse's plans to guard against air and water contamination but had essentially agreed with the company's proposal for dismantling the plant.

Westinghouse owns 228 acres in Hematite, only about seven of which were used in the plant's operations.

The property includes 39 documented, unlined waste-burial pits on the plant site and two unlined evaporation ponds. Both practices were common in the early years of the plant's operation.

Contractors for Westinghouse had already begun removing some equipment and packaging soil from the contaminated mound known as Deul's Mountain and storing the soil on-site, pending final approval of the disposal plan.

Moore said the company was now free to begin removing the soil, which will be shipped to a disposal facility in Utah.

"It's not huge, and the levels of contamination are relatively low, but it is in my opinion to everyone's benefit to get it off-site and to an appropriate disposal facility as expeditiously as possible," Moore said.

Kevin Hayes, an environmental manager for Westinghouse, said the company has also applied to the Nuclear Regulator Commission for a license amendment to allow removal of contaminated buildings.

If the request is approved, Hayes said, contractors could begin taking down the buildings by next fall.

Westinghouse acquired the plant in 2000 and closed it in 2001 to consolidate operations in South Carolina.

Mallinckrodt Chemical Co. opened the plant in 1956 to fill military contracts. The plant later was used to manufacture nuclear fuel-rod

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assemblies for power plants.

"We still have to deal with whatever is going to be done with the burial pits and lagoons," Hayes said. "But, hopefully, the buildings and whatnot will be done in the next 18 months or less."

Tests in 2002 near the shuttered plant on Highway P turned up eight nearby wells contaminated with the chemicals trichloroethylene and tetrachloroethylene. Westinghouse paid to cap private wells and connect nearby residents to public water service to contain the contamination.

The chemicals were used as cleaning agents at the plant in the 1950s and 1960s and have been linked to cancer and other health problems. Officials with Westinghouse believe that the chemicals may have come from one of the burial pits.

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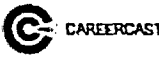
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