



## Guest column: Fluor event not a show-stopper

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### ***Fred Hughes***

While the April 11 event was out of the ordinary, it is by no means a show-stopper with respect to our mission to characterize, treat, repackage and ship wastes out of Idaho, writes Fred Hughes.

On April 11, four drums of solidified radioactive and hazardous wastes generated during the 1960s breached at the Department of Energy's Idaho Site. Emergency personnel did an outstanding job in responding. Fluor Idaho is conducting a detailed investigation to determine the cause and will share the results once available.

Until the day of the event, the Accelerated Retrieval Project V facility had processed approximately 9,500 drums of radioactive and hazardous wastes without incident. Nothing unusual was noted about the waste characteristics inside the affected drums. After processing, the waste was transferred to new drums and sat for several hours before the event occurred.

The ARP V facility is the ideal place to process challenging waste forms. It has negative air pressure, which draws air from the outside and discharges all exhaust through high-efficiency particulate air filters. During the event, the facility operated as designed, trapping the contaminants inside the building and its filters. There were no releases to the environment.

Crews, wearing special anti-contamination suits with supplied air, have since safely entered the ARP V facility. They've ensured the building's ventilation system is continuing to operate effectively, placed a closed-circuit video camera in the room to monitor the drums, and have taken several samples. Cleanup of the area has begun and will continue for several weeks.

The investigation has entered a forensic phase where waste samples from the drums have been sent to offsite laboratories for analysis. We expect to learn specifics about the waste and why it reacted after being processed and placed in clean drums.

Our Technical Team, Re-Entry Team, and Cause Analysis Team have each been extremely valuable in providing professional support following this event. Engineers and scientists from Idaho National Laboratory contractor Battelle Energy Alliance and Savannah River Nuclear Laboratory have also assisted. The DOE Idaho Operations Office is closely following all aspects of the investigation and recovery efforts as is the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

Meanwhile, we continue to meet commitments made to the citizens of Idaho by continuing shipments of waste certified for safe disposal. Once the required corrective actions are in place, we plan to resume the exhumation of buried waste soon with the expressed purpose of protecting the Snake River Plain Aquifer long term.

While the April 11 event was out of the ordinary, it is by no means a show-stopper with respect to our mission to characterize, treat, repackage, and ship wastes out of Idaho. Fluor Idaho has both the outstanding trained staff and state-of-the-art facilities designed for this kind of work necessary to continue our important work for the DOE and Idaho citizens.

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**Fred Hughes is program manager of Fluor.**