Recovery Act funds advance cleanup efforts at Cold War site

June 29, 2010

Local small business starts demolition of world's first plutonium processing facility

LOS ALAMOS, New Mexico, June 29, 2010—Los Alamos National Laboratory this week began demolishing a cluster of 65-year-old buildings that once housed the world's first full-scale plutonium processing line. The work is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which is helping advance and accelerate cleanup efforts around the Department of Energy's weapons complex.

A local small business, ARSEC Environmental, LLC, of White Rock, NM, won a $2 million task order in April to perform this work.

The buildings, known as "DP West," housed plutonium processing for nuclear warheads from late 1945 through 1978. They are the second generation of Lab buildings,

replacing those built during World War II for the Manhattan Project. DP West is located within the Lab's historic Technical Area 21.

"These buildings served their purpose during a difficult time in American history," said LANL Recovery Act cleanup director Bruce Schappell. "It's just as important today to come full circle and finish the cleanup."

George Rael, manager of environmental projects at the NNSA's Los Alamos Site Office, said "The Recovery Act funding has provided a great opportunity to make progress towards cleaning up TA-21 and ultimately making it available for land transfer."

After demolition is complete, crews will analyze and remediate the concrete slabs and soils remaining, as part of the Consent Order on cleanup with the state of New Mexico.

The buildings at DP West were arranged as wings off a central hallway and served as a sort of assembly line, where plutonium in a liquid solution– produced at the Hanford Plant in Washington State– was extracted, processed into metal form, and shaped into cores for nuclear weapons. The plutonium was used in above- and belowground nuclear tests in the Pacific and at the Nevada Test Site.

LANL plutonium operations were moved to their present location, the Lab's Technical Area 55, in 1978.

Los Alamos National Laboratory **www.lanl.gov** **(505) 667-7000** **Los Alamos, NM**

Operated by Los Alamos National Security, LLC for the Department of Energy's NNSA