

HANFORD VITRIFICATION PLANT LAYS OFF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS



The odds are good that if I told you about layoffs at the Hanford vitrification plant that you would not have a solid handle on what kind of workers exactly are being laid off. So in order to get us all up to speed here is a look at the company that is doing the laying off and how they **describe themselves**: "In southeastern Washington State, Bechtel National, Inc. is designing, constructing and commissioning the world's largest radioactive waste treatment plant for the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). When complete, the Hanford Tank Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant (WTP) will process and stabilize 56 million gallons of radioactive and chemical waste currently stored at the Hanford Site. The WTP will use vitrification technology, which involves blending the waste with glass-forming materials and heating it to 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit (1,149 degrees Celsius). The mixture is then poured into stainless steel canisters to cool and solidify. In this glass form, the waste is stable and impervious to the environment, and its radioactivity will dissipate over hundreds to thousands of years. The WTP Project is equivalent to building two nuclear power plants. Its construction site spans 65 acres and includes four major nuclear facilities -- Pretreatment, Low-Activity Waste Vitrification, High-Level Waste Vitrification and Analytical Laboratory. Construction began in October 2001, and, in mid-2011, the plant surpassed the 60-percent complete mark. The WTP Project is scheduled to complete construction in 2016; reach commissioning in 2019 and achieve full operations in 2022." Well it looks like all of that progress comes at a price. The plant has recently laid off about 200 workers, bringing its total too about 550 workers cut over the last five months. These layoffs are, according to the company, not the only ones to happen. On the bright side these cuts were an anticipated part of the project, so the workers did not expect to be kept on when the job was done. While there are a significant number of workers still left on the project, more than 1,000 in total the cuts are still severe enough to qualify as a mass layoff action under the federal guidelines. There is not word on what specific positions are being let go, how many of each type or what kind of severance or benefits these displaced workers may be entitled to. The plant is also currently beginning to hire for non-construction positions right now. Mass layoff actions have been hard on many workers in many different areas. For those of you who missed out on our [earlier coverage](#) here is a look at how mass layoffs have impacted New Jersey: "Apparently in 2011 roughly 66,800 workers filed for employment in NJ after being let go in a mass layoff. That number was up significantly from 2010, when only 61,398 estimated workers were let go in mass layoff actions. This difference of a little more than 5,000 workers represents a significant increase. Since the unemployment benefit cap was raised to \$600 a week back in January of 2010 this means that the state of New Jersey could be paying as much as \$12,000,000 to this extra unemployed each month that they continue to receive benefits. Though, given who the employers that cut were it might be likely that the numbers are lower. When you consider that the number one sector to layoff was food services, in which salaries are usually quite low, their 60% of a paycheck benefit will most likely not reach the cap. The other two sectors doing large-scale layoffs were transportation and warehouse storage and while these areas do garner higher paychecks than retail services they represent a smaller portion of the overall layoffs."

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