

DOE cleanup subcontracts nourishing local businesses

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The consolidation of the electrical distribution equipment at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant was completed this month to be more in line with the new deactivation mission at the site.

Local businesses are playing a significant role in the ongoing cleanup effort at the U.S. Department of Energy's Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

A vendor forum earlier this year sponsored by Fluor Federal Services, the DOE deactivation and decommissioning contractor, attracted more than 170 vendors from the region interested in doing business at the site.

"Vendors provide a variety of products, including construction and electrical supplies, personal protective equipment, graphics, education services, engineering support, and many other products used at the construction sites," said Bob Nichols, deputy program manager for the Fluor Paducah Deactivation Project.

"Since January, Fluor has spent about \$70 million with nearly 100 local businesses generating new revenue streams in the community," said Nichols. "We have awarded over \$54 million in subcontracts to local businesses."

One of the larger subcontracts Fluor awarded was to Beltline Electric of Paducah. Beltline worked with Fluor to finish the consolidation of the four massive electrical switchyards at the site into one switchyard.

According to the DOE, optimization of the site's utilities and other infrastructure to meet current and future needs will provide cost savings that can be invested back into the plant.

The Paducah plant, which ceased production operations in May 2013, was built with four massive process buildings and supporting infrastructure facilities, including the four electrical switchyards. The switchyards were supplied with enough electricity from three sources to power a city the size of Memphis when the plant was in full production - about 2,000 megawatts.

When the plant was operating, the switchyards reduced power that ran equipment and support facilities from an incoming 161,000 volts to 14,000 volts, according to a DOE spokesman. By comparison, a residential outlet is 120 volts. Power was routed through more than 80 circuit breakers to 35 large transformers throughout the plant. According to the DOE, one of those transformers could handle the total power load for the city of Paducah.

"Currently, electricity consumption at the site is only about 0.5 percent of what was used when the plant was fully operational - about 10 megawatts," said Cory Hicks, Fluor spokesman. "The antiquated switchyards are expensive to maintain and require an enormous amount of electricity to operate."

Swift & Staley, the infrastructure services contractor at the site, began the work of consolidating the electrical distribution equipment in support of the deactivation mission in July 2014. In May 2015, the Fluor Paducah Deactivation Project continued the work by reconfiguring the electrical substations, transformers, breakers, and relays and tying them into the main electrical grid.

The project was completed this month, ahead of schedule and under budget, according to Hicks.

"Safely completing the consolidation of the switchyards was a major accomplishment made possible by the experienced workforce and contractor teamwork," said Jennifer Woodard, Paducah site lead with DOE's Portsmouth/Paducah project office.

"This ensures the site's electrical facilities can support the new activities on site as well as future reindustrialization."