Soft-Sided Containers Being Used at LEHR

The Laboratory for Energy Related Health Research (LEHR), a surplus Department of Energy facility, is located 1.5 miles south of the main campus of the University of California at Davis and is currently performing environmental restoration activities. These activities include decommissioning contaminated buildings; removing on-site radioactive, chemical, and mixed waste sources; and remediating contaminated soils and underground tank systems.

The use of soft-sided containers in place of the metal B-25 bins to store and transport low-level waste (LLW) at LEHR has led to a major cost savings over the life of the project. The reduced cost of the soft-sided containers compared to the metal bins, combined with a reduction in the total weight of materials shipped for disposal, has resulted in a cost savings of approximately $250,000. The soft-sided containers were designed as a cost-efficient replacement to the heavier and more expensive metal or plywood bins which were previously used to package and dispose of LLW. Since these soft-sided containers cost less than the B-25 bins and can hold almost three times the volume, this represents a significant long-term cost savings in the closure of LEHR. Additionally, this technology can be easily transferred for use at other sites with large volumes of LLW, effecting a large cost savings for the Office of Environmental Management (EM).

Initially, LEHR used the metal B-25 bins for interim storage and shipping. In FY 2000, the B-25 bins were replaced with the larger yet cheaper soft-sided containers. The steps required to fill a soft-sided container are essentially identical to the B-25, with the exception of the loading frame, which is necessary for the soft-sided container. Since the loading operations were essentially similar, the same personnel who were filling the B-25 bins could easily be trained and certified in the use of the soft-sided containers.

As with all technologies, the soft-sided container is not perfect for use in all situations. Demonstrations at the Idaho National Environmental and Engineering Laboratory and subsequent use at LEHR has provided EM with a set of lessons-learned which include limitations on the use of soft-sided containers as well as situations where soft-sided containers are significantly cheaper and easier to use than the older metal bins. Because use of the soft-sided containers achieve such a significant cost savings, without significant initial outlays in training and equipment costs, their continued use at sites such as LEHR will allow more site cleanup with less money. ■

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