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Workers line up the final top steel beam Thursday at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory's Physical Science Facility in Richland. The \$224 million research complex will hold laboratories to study radiation detection, materials science and materials along with a low-level underground lab for sensitive work and a radiation portal monitoring test track.

PNNL building topped off

Work at research complex reportedly on schedule

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Ironworkers topped off the new Physical Sciences Facility in Richland Thursday, ceremoniously fitting a steel beam into place at the research complex's highest point as workers gathered to watch.

The ceremony marked the 438th day of construction, with work on the research complex on schedule and budget. It's one of three new facilities planned to replace Pacific Northwest National Laboratory research and office space in the Hanford 300 Area that is being torn down as part of cleanup of the nuclear reservation.

The building is budgeted at \$224 million, which also includes some work to extend the operating life of the Radiochemical Processing Laboratory in the 300 Area. Funding comes from DOE, the National

Nuclear Security Administration and Department of Homeland Security.

"Congratulations to all you guys who put this together," Chad Henderson, the Department of Energy's federal project director, told workers. Their work was safe and it was fast, he said.

Seeing the building go up has helped morale at the national lab, he said. In the years it took to get money to start the project, workers in the 300 Area wondered if they'd still have a job when the buildings there had to come down.

About 450 staff will use the Physical Sciences Facility.

The new facility is important to the community because of the good jobs it will continue to provide, Henderson said. And it's important to the world because of the vital research that will be done there, he said.

The nearly 200,000-square-foot facility will include three buildings.

An ultra-trace module will house specialized labs and instrumentation for developing and testing methods for treaty verification related to nuclear and chemical weapons. The radiation detection module will include a paved track outside the building for testing the detection of

radiological materials in vehicles and containers.

The materials science and technology module will include laboratories for processing radioactive material samples to study their performance in high-radiation and high-temperature conditions. Work will help evaluate the aging of materials in nuclear power plants and the development of radiation-resistant building materials for reactors.

Many of the construction workers building the complex have worked at the Hanford nuclear reservation tearing down old structures. But work on this project will produce a building that will be here for their children and grandchildren, Henderson said.

Drive out to the very north end of George Washington Way in Richland and you'll see the top beam of the building, now decorated with a traditional evergreen tree and American flag.

Ironworkers trace the tradition of topping off a building with a tree to Scandinavian mythology that held that people originated from trees and their spirit returned to trees when they die, said Jim Andrews, president of American Ironworks & Erectors.

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PNNL | 2010 opening planned

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Topping a new wooden building with a leafy branch gave the tree's spirit a home.

That tradition continues on steel-framed structures to bring good luck to a building's occupants, Andrews said.

With the completion of the steel skeleton of the building, crews can begin to close in the structure and install the mechanical, electrical and piping system.

Work was begun by Ran-

dolph Construction Services of Pasco in August to survey the site and provide initial clearing and excavation. Apollo Construction of Kennewick poured the foundation and erected the structural steel. A joint venture between Lydig Construction of Spokane and George Grant Inc. of Richland will complete the building. It should open in 2010.

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