



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **CAPITOL HILL UTILITY TUNNELS REPAIR COMPLETE; PROJECT FINISHED ON TIME AND UNDER BUDGET**

**Washington, DC** - The Office of Compliance announced today that the five-year, multi-million dollar project to remedy life-threatening hazards in the Capitol Power Plant utility tunnels has been completed on time and under budget. The Power Plant provides steam and chilled water to heat and cool all major legislative branch buildings on Capitol Hill.

The project began in June 2007 as the result of an unprecedented settlement between the Office of Compliance (OOC), the agency charged with enforcing workplace protections for legislative branch employees, and the Office of the Architect of the Capitol (AOC), which manages most facilities on Capitol Hill. In 1999, the OOC had discovered hazards during its first safety and health inspection of the utility tunnels, and issued a citation directing the AOC to abate the hazards. Hazardous conditions in the tunnels included asbestos exposure, temperatures exceeding 160 degrees Fahrenheit, falling concrete, insufficient emergency exits and an inadequate emergency communications system, among others. After lengthy efforts to achieve abatement of the hazards proved unsuccessful, in February 2006 OOC General Counsel Peter Ames Eveleth filed a first-ever administrative complaint under the Congressional Accountability Act. The complaint charged multiple violations of occupational safety and health standards and sought an order requiring that the hazards be remedied in their entirety.

The OOC and the AOC entered into a Settlement Agreement in June 2007 that provided for full abatement of the hazards by June 2012 and established liaison officials in both the OOC and the AOC to monitor progress under the Settlement. The project was estimated to cost \$296 million but ultimately was completed for just over \$173 million – a savings of 40%.

General Counsel Eveleth said, “Successfully completing the tunnels project is a big step forward for the safety and health of the Congressional workforce. Thanks to the continuing cooperation between the Architect and the OOC, and with solid Congressional backing during the project, the utility tunnels are now fully compliant with occupational safety and health protections required by the Settlement. Tunnel employees can go to work knowing that their workplace is free from life-threatening hazards. The on-time, under-budget completion of this project is a tribute to the efforts of all concerned. As the tunnels are inherently high hazard areas, through its biennial inspections the OOC will continue to monitor the AOC’s ongoing maintenance obligations to assure worker protection.”

OOC Executive Director Tamara E. Chrisler said, “The tunnels project shows what can be achieved when all of us on Capitol Hill work together toward a common goal. At a time when cynicism about government is rampant, this achievement demonstrates the value of teamwork and collaborative effort.”

The Office of Compliance is responsible for enforcing safety, health, public access and workplace rights in the legislative branch of the federal government.

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