



Hanford Happenings

Tri-Party Agreement

July 1997

Cleanup is underway at Hanford and the number of actions requiring public participation remains steady. The U.S. Department of Energy, Washington State Department of Ecology, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, offer this monthly calendar to help you keep track of scheduled meetings, public comment opportunities and events, and the unavoidable changes in schedules. For the latest information, call Hanford Cleanup toll-free at 1-800-321-2008 or view our internet site at <http://www.wa.gov/ecology/nwp/hhc.htm>

July

July 1

Surplus Plutonium Disposition Environmental Impact Statement Public Workshops; 1-4 p.m. and 6-9 p.m., Shilo Inn, 50 Comstock, Richland, Washington. Contact the Office of Fissile Materials Disposition 1-800-820-5134.

July 9

TPA Quarterly Public Involvement Planning meeting; 1-3 p.m., Ridpath Hotel, 515 West Sprague, Spokane, Washington. Contact Judy Graybeal (509) 376-2472.

July 9

Hanford Advisory Board Public Involvement Committee meeting; 3-5 p.m., Ridpath Hotel, 515 West Sprague, Spokane, Washington. Contact Judy Graybeal (509) 376-2472.

July 9

Hanford Advisory Board Evening Session; 7-9 p.m., panel discussion on the explosion at the Plutonium Reclamation Facility, Ridpath Hotel, 515 West Sprague, Spokane, Washington. Contact Gail McClure (509) 373-5647.

July 10

Hanford Advisory Board Evening Session; 7-9 p.m., Ridpath Hotel, 515 West Sprague, Spokane, Washington. Agenda to include discussion of National Equity Dialogue. Contact Gail McClure (509) 373-5647.

July 10-11

Hanford Advisory Board meeting; Ridpath Hotel, 515 West Sprague, Spokane, Washington. Contact Barb Wise (509) 373-5647.

July 17

Ecology/Hanford Public Interest Group Bimonthly meeting; 1:30-5 p.m., Ecology Headquarters, 300 Desmond Drive, Lacey, Washington. Agenda to be determined. Contact Michelle Davis (360) 407-7126.

Hanford Advisory Board Progress Report

By Marilyn Reeves, Chair

The Hanford Advisory Board (HAB) continued to provide advice during 1996 on activities to accelerate cleanup, protect workers, public health, and the environment and manage dangerous radioactive wastes in a cost effective way.

Significant and impressive cleanup progress was made in 1996 by the Department of Energy (DOE), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), and their contractors. The HAB contributed to this progress and helped expedite cleanup through open discussion among interest groups, experts, and policy makers on controversial issues. HAB consensus advice resulting from that informed discussion has helped resolve many uncertainties that could unnecessarily slow decisions.

For example, this past summer the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility was opened ahead of schedule. This enabled the removal of contaminated soil from along the Columbia River to begin in earnest. The HAB influenced this fast track construction when it provided advice in July 1994. HAB advice helped regulators resolve sticky regulator issues related to siting, size, construction, and use of this state-of-the-art burial site. Randy Smith, Director of EPA's Hazardous Waste Division acknowledged, "Without the Board, it would have taken months of costly delay to reach resolution on these issues."

The HAB urged that removal of corroding spent nuclear fuel from the K-Reactor storage basins, which are located less than a quarter mile from the Columbia River, be accelerated. DOE agreed and so far there has been steady progress in resolving difficult technical problems and maintaining the

path forward. Recent proposed 1997 budget cuts could cause troubling delays in this high priority project.

The HAB urged that there be adequate funding for the clean-out and secure shut-down of the aged industrial production buildings. For example, spending money now for the removal of residual plutonium in the PUREX glove boxes protects workers and saves security and maintenance costs.

The HAB was a co-sponsor of the highly acclaimed Plutonium Roundtable. This education project was spearheaded by the Washington League of Women Voters and the Physicians for Social Responsibility with ten co-sponsors. The workshops, conducted in Richland and Seattle, featured the Russian Deputy Minister on Atomic Energy, Assistant DOE Secretary Thomas Grumbly, Governor Lowry, and many national and international experts. This innovative program focused on the uncertainties and controversies that surround the disposition of the U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons stockpile. It was replicated by citizens at the Savannah River Plant in South Carolina.

The HAB was formed in 1994 to provide advice on Hanford cleanup and waste management. It is made up of representatives of many groups that are affected or impacted by various aspects of the long-term site work. Local and regional governments, Native American tribes, business interests, workers, environmental organizations, the State of Oregon, health agencies, public interest groups, and the public-at-large are represented.

In 1996, the Board held seven two day meetings, in addition to special meetings on budget and strategic planning. Three committees meet on a monthly basis.

The Environmental Restoration Committee, chaired by Ralph Patt, a nationally respected hydrogeologist, monitors the actual cleanup activities, with particular attention to the contaminated areas along the Columbia River and the issues related to groundwater contamination and remediation.

The Health, Safety, and Waste Management Committee, chaired by Dick Belsey, a retired physician who has devoted many years to monitoring Hanford site issues, tracks the quantity, toxicity, risks, and special characteristics of the numerous waste streams on site. These include the wastes in the 177 huge underground single shell and double shell tanks. The Committee also pays particular attention to improving worker safety and removing threats to public health.

The Dollars and Sense Committee, chaired by Gerry Pollet, a Seattle attorney and Executive Director of Heart of America Northwest, reviews budgets and expenditures. As a result of DOE site manager John Wagoner's October 1994 decision to share budget priorities and numbers early in the process, the Committee and the HAB have had unprecedented access to information about real dollars in real time. This has helped reduce costs and refocus priorities.

During 1996, the HAB submitted 22 pieces of consensus advice on a wide range of issues. Much attention was focused on Hanford's most serious long-term problem, the toxic and radioactive contaminants in, under, and around the tanks. The HAB supports the retrieval and vitrification of dangerous and long-lived wastes but considers the current privatization effort a strategy that has a high risk of failure. Recent proposals to reduce funding of characterization of tank

waste will create long-term delays and add to risks. The HAB will continue to work with DOE, EPA, and Ecology to identify and reduce tank waste technical, economic, safety, and other risks.

Removal of wastes along the Columbia River continues to be a high priority with the HAB. Recognizing that groundwater remediation remains a difficult unresolved technical problem, the HAB supported funding for pump and treat to prevent chromium, strontium-90, carbon tetrachloride, and other contaminants from reaching the River. The Board strongly supports source reduction, and the elimination of liquid effluent discharges to the soil in 1994 was a major achievement.

The HAB spent a considerable amount of time this past year reviewing various DOE planning documents. Finding many inconsistencies among and between documents, the HAB recommended that DOE develop consistent terminology and use the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) between DOE, EPA, and Ecology as the blueprint for long-term planning.

The fact that such a large group of diverse interests might be productive and reach consensus over a three year period continues to amaze and confound most of us. John Wagoner, Hanford Site Manager, noted a year ago, "Most Board members are natural skeptics. Just the presence of the Board has substantially changed the Department's outlook and attitude." More recently, he noted, "The Board has made extraordinary contributions to the Department decision-making."

Dan Silver, Assistant Director for Waste Management at Ecology, was justified in worrying that the HAB was too large to be effective. Boards that begin with 32 members and 45 alternates are a recipe for chaos. Mr. Silver recently noted, "I know the Board still seems a bit unruly, but think back to the summer of 1994. Could you imag-

ine then how such disparate characters could come together in committees, become knowledgeable of substance and respectful of each other and produce more than 50 pieces of consensus advice on a broad range of often sensitive subjects in just two years?"

During a well-attended September meeting, Randy Smith publicly encouraged Al Alm, DOE Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management, to pay special attention to the HAB's advice. He cautioned, "When you get letters from this Board, they're the product of a careful committee structure. A great deal of work has gone into integrating the view points here. We have learned over the years to really watch and pay attention to this advice. I would urge you and folks in D.C. to do the same."

The folks in D.C. include those who determine the final amount of funding and those who can accelerate or impede any project. The new Secretary designate, the officials at the Office of Management and Budget, Congressional committees, and the many think tank experts dominate and influence decisions in a way that the HAB cannot.

The HAB was created to advise the TPA agencies, not to lobby Congress. But those within D.C. who make decisions must not ignore this grassroots Board. The HAB has a solid track record of helping find workable solutions. Members have a collective expertise that cannot be replicated and an historical memory that must not be ignored.

As the Chair of this Board, I look forward to working with DOE Headquarters to design a National Dialogue on the policy choices for transport, storage, and disposition of the nuclear material that must be removed from the weapons arsenal. But cleanup must continue on schedule and national leaders must recognize that

government decisions that are made in haste without adequate public discussion are doomed to delay or failure. This National Dialogue would provide for comprehensive public discussion of the scope of the problem, the short-term and long-term options, the costs, the geographic burdens or opportunities, and the time-frame for final decisions.

We in the Northwest refer to this as the National Equity Dialogue. Equity does not mean dividing the long term burdens or economic opportunities. Equity is improving public understanding, involving the public in the selection of options, and developing public trust and credibility so that ultimate decisions can be implemented. Equity is the process of developing solutions in an open, impartial manner.

Finally, cost-effective cleanup depends on timely and adequate funding in accord with legally mandated TPA milestones. These legal obligations must not be renegotiated just because of budget shortfalls. Delays increase long-term costs and threaten public and worker health and safety.

For further information about the HAB or to get a copy of the 1996 Progress Report, call 509-943-1804.

Marilyn B. Reeves has served as Chair of the HAB since 1995. She has been a long time active member of the League of Women Voters. She has an extensive public involvement background and has served on a variety of federal, state, and local boards, including the Environmental Protection Agency's National Drinking Water Advisory Council, the University of California Berkeley's College of Natural Resources Advisory Board, and the State of Oregon's Building Code Structure Board.

August

August 7

Hanford Advisory Board Health, Safety & Waste Management Committee Meeting; 9 a.m.- 4 p.m., Portland Airport Conference Center, Multnomah B Room, Portland, Oregon. Contact Barb Wise (509) 372-4327.

August 8

Hanford Advisory Board Dollars & Sense Committee meeting; 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Portland Airport Conference Center, Multnomah B Room, Portland, Oregon. Contact Barb Wise (509) 372-4327.

August 14-15

Hanford Natural Resource Trustee Council meeting; 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Portland, Oregon. Agenda and location to be determined. Contact Kay Kimmel (509) 372-9108.

September

September 4-5

Hanford Advisory Board meeting; Tower Inn, 1515 George Washington Way, Richland, Washington. Agenda to be determined. Contact Barb Wise (509) 373-5647.

Public Comment Periods

May 22-July 18

Public comments are being sought in preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the siting of disposition activities for the Nation's surplus weapons plutonium. The department will use the EIS, along with other information, to help decide where to construct and operate the facilities required for disposing of up to 50 metric tons of plutonium. Contact the Office of Fissile Materials Disposition 1-800-820-5134.

June 9-July 23

K Basins Spent Nuclear Fuel Project proposed changes will direct current project activities and removal of 2,100 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel from two basins near the banks of the Columbia River. Contact George Sanders (509) 376-6888 or e-mail george_h_sanders@rl.gov

June 9-July 23

Disposition of Hanford Surplus Reactors. These proposed modifications document agreed to work schedules which govern the decommissioning and final disposal of USDOE's nine surplus reactors along the Columbia River. Contact George Sanders (509) 376-6888 or e-mail george_h_sanders@rl.gov

Every effort has been made to list correct information, but dates, times, and locations for particular meetings may change. For more information, please call Michelle Davis, Editor, at 1-800-321-2008, or any of the following Hanford Tri-Party Agreement agency public involvement contacts:

U.S. Department of Energy:
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency:
WA State Dept. of Ecology:

Gail McClure at (509) 373-5647
Dennis Faulk at (509) 376-8631
Zelma Maine-Jackson (509) 736-3024

The Hanford Tri-Party Agreement agencies are equal opportunity agencies. If you have special accommodation needs or require this material in an alternate format, please contact Michelle Davis at (360) 407-7126 (Voice), (360) 407-6206 (TDD), or e-mail mdav461@ecy.wa.gov