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From: Tom_OBrien@r1.fws.gov
Sent: Monday, April 24, 2000 11:24 AM
To: Hanford_Trustees.FWS@r1.fws.gov
Subject: FYI - Hanford in the news

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----- Forwarded by Tom OBrien/RO/R1/FWS/DOI on 04/24/2000 11:23 AM -----

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04/22/2000
05:09 PM
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cc:
Subject: FYI - Hanford in the news

Manager of Hanford cleanup resigns

'Shocked' at spiraling cost, irked at 'mouthpiece' role

Saturday, April 15, 2000

By ROBERT McCLURE <Picture: Mail Author>
SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER

The general manager of the long-delayed cleanup of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation is resigning, saying he is "shocked" that the cleanup cost has nearly doubled and angry that he was made into a "mouthpiece" without being given authority over the project.

Mike Lawrence, who arrived to head up BNFL Inc.'s River Protection-Waste Treatment Plant a year ago today, submitted his resignation Thursday. That was only days after news broke that the cleanup price would balloon from just under \$7 billion to \$13 billion or more.

BNFL is the lead contractor in a project to encase in glass millions of gallons of radioactive waste produced by nuclear weapons production for the Cold War.

Lawrence, well-respected in the Tri-Cities area where the nuclear reservation is located, said he was shut out of the chain of command twice -- before coming to the Tri-Cities, when he was BNFL's chief operating officer in Washington, D.C., and five months ago, after seven months as the onsite manager.

"I was not responsible for things this project was doing before I came here," Lawrence said last night from his home in Kennewick. "There were things that were done before I came out here, and from Nov. 15 on, that since I wasn't responsible for, I did not feel comfortable defending."

The news earlier this week that the cleanup cost could almost double angered officials from the U.S. Department of Energy, which is overseeing the cleanup, as well as state officials and Washington's congressional delegation.

Energy Department officials even broached the possibility that they would find another contractor if BNFL's cost estimate is too high when submitted

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that agency morphed into the Department of Energy, he was DOE's on-site manager of Hanford from 1984 to 1990, as the facility was making the transition from producing nuclear weapons to cleaning up the mess left behind.

Some 54 million gallons of radioactive waste at Hanford are stored underground in 177 large steel-and-concrete underground storage tanks. Sixty-seven are suspected to have leaks. Underground, radioactive waste is gurgling toward the Columbia River.

Lawrence will be replaced, at least temporarily, by Maruice Bullock, a BNFL official who Lawrence said was tapped to take over design and financial work in November. At that point, Lawrence was made a "mouthpiece," according to his resignation letter.

"I cannot in good conscience continue to be a figurehead and mouthpiece for a project for which I do not have responsibility and authority," according to Lawrence's resignation letter.

Lawrence also confirmed that his e-mail to his employees said, "Recent events put me in the position of having to explain and defend actions both before I came to the project and since November for which I did not have responsibility or authority."

Asked how he felt when he heard about the new cost estimate, Lawrence said, "Shocked is the right word."

In August, Lawrence wrote in a opinion piece for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer:

"I've worked my entire career in the nuclear business and believe in the old childhood adage "you're not finished playing until you put away your toys." While the analogy is elementary -- and the tank wastes are not toys -- the message still applies."