

HANFORD NATURAL RESOURCE TRUSTEE COUNCIL

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MURKOWSKI: TAXPAYERS FACE VIRTUALLY UNLIMITED LIABILITY WITHOUT BOLD CHANGES TO HANFORD CLEANUP STRATEGY.

WASHINGTON -- There is almost no limit to what the taxpayer will be asked to pay in the absence of a bold, new approach to cleaning up Hanford, according to Alaska Sen. Frank Murkowski.

At a press conference accepting an outside report from independent experts, Murkowski today indicated that the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will hold hearings beginning next week to explore what changes can be made to restore common sense and logic to the cleanup effort.

"The potential taxpayer liabilities are astounding, limited only by the imagination of anybody's lawyer," said Murkowski. Under the provisions of existing law and the Tri-Party Agreement between the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the State of Washington, taxpayers could be saddled with a bill for billions of dollars beyond the funds needed for the actual cleanup.

Murkowski also noted the irony that taxpayer dollars were being proposed to contain and store North Korean nuclear waste -- waste that could eventually end up at Hanford.

"I find it astounding that we apparently have the money to compound the problems at Hanford, but we lack the money to clean them up," Murkowski said.

Murkowski, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, made his comments as he and Ranking Member Bennett Johnston released the report entitled "Train Wreck Along the River of Money," an evaluation of the Hanford cleanup compiled by independent consultants Steve Blush and Tom Heitman. The report found that the cleanup of nuclear wastes at Hanford is:

- * Floundering in a legal and regulatory morass that often does more harm than good.
- * That there is no clear, realistic vision or attainable plan for the cleanup.
- * That most management decisions can't be justified in relation to their costs or the risks they are supposed to address.
- * That the cleanup schedule is unrealistic.
- * That the public is being misled as to the level of cleanup possible at Hanford.
- * And that the level of expenditures is totally out of line with

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what is being achieved.

"Since 1989, U.S. taxpayers have spent \$7.5 billion on what has become the largest civil works project in human history. Today, we're spending \$5 million a day. Unfortunately only about 10 percent of the funding actually goes to remove and dispose of radioactive waste and other contamination. The rest goes for managing the facilities, storing waste and complying with the seemingly endless and complex federal, state and local laws.

"The Department of Energy clearly is not in control of the science, management and legal and regulatory framework governing the cleanup. And there are dangerous or potentially dangerous situations that still exist at the reservation. Hanford is indeed a train wreck that is about to happen. Despite the river of money that has been diverted to the problem, the wreck is still imminent. We must consider new approaches to stop this wreck from happening," said Murkowski.

He said he has scheduled hearings to formally receive the report for 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday, March 22. Recommendations contained in the report include:

- * That the Tri-Party Agreement, that currently governs the cleanup, should be scrapped as a failure.
- * That Congress should "forge a new beginning" by untying Hanford from its legal and regulatory morass.
- * That Congress should determine the level of cleanup that will be carried out.
- * And that cleanup should be based on a long-range risk assessment plan to be conducted by the Department of Energy.

"I'm not ready to pass judgement on the recommendations in the report. They need to be reviewed carefully through a hearing process. But we must consider all the recommendations because clearly, what we are doing right now is not working," said Murkowski.

The report unveiled today, about six months in the making, was commissioned by the former chairman of the Senate committee, Sen. Bennett Johnston, D-La.. It was designed to look at the pace of the cleanup and review its assumptions.

Murkowski said he hoped that the committee would be in a position to move to implement some recommendations to improve conditions at Hanford before this fall.