



Hanford Update



April 2003

bulletin on Hanford cleanup and compliance

EDMC

Tri-Party Agencies can't reach TRU agreement

Agencies file lawsuits

The Tri-Party Agencies ended negotiations on March 1 when an agreement could not be reached on managing transuranic (TRU) and mixed transuranic waste stored at Hanford.

Transuranic, or TRU, waste generally consists of protective clothing, tools, glassware, equipment, soils, and sludge contaminated with manmade radioisotopes heavier than uranium. Transuranic elements are beyond or "heavier" than uranium on the periodic table of the elements. These elements include plutonium, neptunium, americium, curium, and californium. Transuranic waste is produced during nuclear fuel assembly; during nuclear weapons research, production, and cleanup; and as a result of reprocessing spent nuclear fuel.

The parties disagreed on one fundamental issue — whether Washington State or the Department of Energy has regulatory authority over TRU waste.

The State of Washington filed a lawsuit in federal court on March 4 seeking to stop future shipments of TRU waste from being sent to Hanford from other Department of Energy sites.

Following filing of the lawsuit, the U.S. Department of Justice agreed to suspend additional shipments of TRU waste to Hanford for 45 days. A hearing on the preliminary injunction is scheduled for April 18 in federal court in Yakima.

On April 9, the Department of Energy filed its own lawsuit challenging Washington State's recent Director of Ecology determination under the Tri-Party Agreement relating to TRU waste cleanup.

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Public Comment Periods

March 24 - May 7

Hanford Groundwater Strategy

March 31 - April 29

183-H Solar Evaporation Basin
Engineering Evaluation / Cost Analysis

April 2 - May 2

TPA Annual
Public Involvement Evaluation

April 11 - May 27

Hanford Solid Waste
Environmental Impact Statement

for more details see page 6

Hanford Cleanup Line

1-800-321-2008

Call the Hanford Cleanup Line for more information about Hanford cleanup issues and activities.

More money for Hanford cleanup!

\$2 billion proposed for 2004

On February 3, President Bush announced his fiscal year 2004 federal budget request, which includes \$23.4 billion for the Department of Energy. Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham, in his address to employees and stakeholders later that day, announced that about \$7.2 billion would go to the USDOE Environmental Management program to support the new accelerated risk reduction and cleanup strategies.

Hanford's overall portion of the 2004 budget request, excluding program direction funds (salaries, benefits, etc.), is about \$2 billion. Of that, the Richland Operations Office would receive \$963 million — a \$111 million increase from the 2003 request — and the Office of River Protection would receive about \$1 billion.

The increased funding request supports major cleanup activities at Hanford in the coming year. As outlined in the Hanford Performance Management Plan, the Richland Office will complete the removal of the remaining spent nuclear fuel from the K Basins near the Columbia River (see article at right); finish stabilizing all three forms of leftover plutonium at the Plutonium Finishing Plant; cocoon two more reactors; and implement Phase I of the River Corridor Contract.

The Office of River Protection will continue construction on the Waste Treatment Plant complex along with continuing with the interim stabilization work on Hanford's single-shell tanks.

The Department of Energy plans to conduct public meetings on Hanford's budget and cleanup priorities in April. Four public meetings are scheduled: Seattle (April 15), Portland (April 22), Hood River (April 23) and Richland (April 24).



A container of spent nuclear fuel being moved

Radioactive spent fuel moved away from the river

Two million pounds = halfway point

On January 8, Hanford's Spent Nuclear Fuel Project passed a critical juncture when it finished moving more than two million pounds (957 metric tons) of highly radioactive spent nuclear fuel out of the K Basins. Nearly 25 million curies of radioactivity contained in the fuel was moved away from the shoreline of the Columbia River. Moving this fuel represents one of the most significant risk reduction activities in Hanford's 60-year history.

The spent fuel was moved from underwater storage pools in the aging K Basins to dry storage in specially designed, vacuum-dried canisters, called Multi-Canister Overpacks (MCOs). The MCOs are being stored in a dry, underground vault miles away from the river until being disposed of in a national repository. This milestone almost brings the project to the halfway point of removing all the spent fuel (2100 metric tons, more than 4 million pounds) from both basins by 2004.

"Getting to this point has taken the dedication and innovation of a whole lot of people to overcome all that could go wrong and did go wrong," said USDOE Richland Operations Office Manager Keith Klein in acknowledging the accomplishment.

FFTF Shutdown: Court Rules *Sodium drain begins*

Following months of legal suits, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in early April denied an extension to an injunction preventing deactivation work at the Fast Flux Test Facility (FFTF), and on April 7, workers began draining sodium coolant from the reactor.

Meanwhile, the Tri-Party Agencies are finalizing changes to the proposed FFTF TPA deactivation milestones and schedule that were originally out for public comment in the fall of 2002.

A public comment period was held from August 28 - October 28, 2002, on proposed milestones changing the schedule for deactivating the reactor.

Before the milestone changes could be finalized, a lawsuit was filed by Benton County to stop shutdown activities, claiming USDOE failed to fully identify the environmental impacts. A judge ruled in the federal government's favor in late February, saying that the statute of limitations had expired.

The judge also ruled that USDOE's decision to prepare their 1995 Environmental Assessment, analyzing the potential environmental impacts of placing FFTF in a shutdown condition, was reasonable. Benton County filed an appeal in mid-March, but the injunction against shutdown activities was denied in early April, and deactivation activities began.

The agencies are now finalizing responses to comments received during the comment period and at four public meetings held in Yakima, Seattle, Portland, and Richland. The agencies received a total of 1,884 comments from 745 individuals and groups. About 113 comments applied directly to the draft change package; most of the remaining comments involved issues that went beyond the scope of the draft change package.

Environmental Impact of Closing Hanford Tanks Discussed

Scoping meetings draw interest

Approximately 100 people attended four meetings to provide feedback on what should be included in the U.S. Department of Energy's draft Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed retrieval, treatment, and disposal of tank waste and closure of high-level waste single-shell tanks at Hanford.

Recommendations included safety concerns, evaluating short- and long-term impacts to the environment, including groundwater and soil cleanup; the need for a thorough risk analysis on the various closure options; and questions about why USDOE is considering closure in this EIS when the public believes there has not been enough information collected to get to 99% retrieval of tank waste.

Cleanup of tank waste at the Hanford Site is one of the nation's largest and most complex environmental challenges. Sixty percent of the volume (53 million gallons) of the nation's nuclear waste is stored in Hanford's 177 aging underground tanks. The 149 older single-shell tanks are more than 20 years beyond their intended life span and 67 of these tanks are suspected to have leaked radioactive waste into the ground. USDOE filed a Notice of Intent to prepare the draft EIS in January. Regional scoping meetings were held in Richland, Seattle, Portland and Hood River. A Notice of Intent was filed in the Federal Register on January 8, 2003.

USDOE's proposal is to end all waste, treatment, disposal, and closure activities associated with the tank systems by 2033. USDOE plans to retrieve wastes from the single-shell tanks and double-shell tanks, close tank systems under federal and state regulations, and protect workers, the public and the environment. USDOE requested public feedback on six alternatives: (1) No action, (2) implementation of the 1997 TWRS Record of Decision with modifications, (3) landfill closure of tank farms/onsite and offsite waste disposal, (4) clean closure of tank farms/onsite and offsite waste disposal, (5) accelerated landfill closure/onsite and offsite waste disposal, and (6) landfill closure/onsite and offsite waste disposal.

USDOE plans to have the draft EIS out for public review and comment in late 2003. Comments heard during the scoping process will be addressed in the draft document, and public meetings will be held in the same four locations.

For more information about the Tank Closure EIS, please contact Mary Beth Burandt, Document Manager, USDOE Office of River Protection, 509-373-9160 or via e-mail: Mary_E_Burandt@rl.gov.

A PROGRESS REPORT

FROM THE HANFORD ADVISORY BOARD

By Susan Leckband
Non-Union/Non-Management Hanford Workforce HAB member

The Hanford Advisory Board was established eight years ago to provide advice to the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) agencies on Hanford cleanup and waste management. The Board includes representatives of local and regional government, Native American tribes, business interests, workers, the State of Oregon, environmental organizations, universities, public interest groups, and the public-at-large. The Board is chaired by Todd Martin, representing Citizens for a Clean Eastern Washington. Ken Bracken, Benton County, and Shelley Cimon, Oregon Hanford Waste Board, serve as co-vice chairs for the board. Principles adopted by the Board have helped to form a Northwest stakeholder vision of what the Hanford Site should be like in the future.

WIPPed Into Shape

(WIPP is the acronym for the Waste Isolation Pilot Project)

The definition of Transuranic Waste (TRU) is: "without regard to source or form, radioactive waste that is contaminated with alpha-emitting transuranium radionuclides with half-lives greater than 20 years and concentrations greater than 100 nCi/g." Hanford's current forecast volume of TRU waste is about 25,000 square meters – that's a lot of waste. So what does that mean in layman's terms? TRU waste is really nasty, can be in solid or liquid form (or anything in between), is harmful to people and the environment and Hanford has a lot of it. Also, some of it is so harmful that it must be handled remotely.

The good news is that the Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP) is up and running and Hanford is successfully sending TRU waste to WIPP for final disposition. Another plus is the program at Hanford is ramping up the schedule to send more waste to WIPP faster!

To help understand the DOE complex-wide TRU issues, an Environmental Management Site-Specific Advisory Board Workshop on TRU Waste Management was held in Carlsbad, New Mexico, January 29th through February 1st. Harold Heacock and Susan Leckband represented the Hanford Advisory Board and

Max Power attended for the Washington State Department of Ecology. Many representatives from the advisory boards across the nation participated in the workshop.



Max Power and Susan Leckband gear up for their tour of WIPP.

Most of those attending the workshop participated in a tour of WIPP, hosted by employees acting as tour guides and information sources. And what terrific sources of information they were. We received a briefing on the mission, history, operations and issues regarding WIPP and the tour was divided into 2 sections: above ground facilities and a tour of the mine itself. The opportunity to actually go underground and see the operation was incredible! It is clear that the WIPP folks are dedicated, have refined their processes to enhance the speed of processing the waste, and are ready to step up the pace!

This purpose of the workshop was threefold: to provide a venue for the citizen advisory boards from across the DOE complex to engage in conversations regarding TRU waste issues at their sites; to develop a set of recommendations regarding TRU waste disposition; and to provide the advisory boards an opportunity to see the WIPP operation first hand. Opening remarks were provided by Patty Bubar from DOE Headquarters and Dr. Ines Triay, Manager of the WIPP operation. Following the plenary session that began with a discussion of TRU issues, four core areas of discussion were identified: Regulatory and Public Involvement; Transportation; Waste Characterization, Treatment and Packaging; and Management strategies.

A series of core topic discussions, recommendation refinements, and plenary sessions were held over a two-day period. These activities resulted in a compilation of potential recommendations to be provided to DOE Headquarters to address complex-wide TRU waste issues. Of course there are hitches in this process. It is the responsibility of each site's representative to present the recommendations to their entire advisory board at the next meeting to obtain approval. Although the recommendations may not be sent to DOE HQ via this consensus process, I believe HQ will get the messages from the individual advisory boards.

Having the various advisory boards come together to discuss mutual and site-specific issues related to TRU waste disposition serves to further overall understanding. These types of meetings provide us a window to see how we fit into the overall picture of waste disposition across this country. We are part of a whole and strength can be demonstrated by our willingness to stay informed and work towards solutions.

As Will Rogers said, "*Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.*" We need to stay focused and get on with cleanup.



Transuranic waste drums
in underground storage.

How You Can be Involved

The next meeting of the Board will be held in June. Public comment periods are provided during each day of the meeting. The Board encourages the public to attend its meetings and would like to hear from you about the issues and concerns you have about cleanup at Hanford. For more specific information on the April Board meeting, please contact Yvonne Sherman at 509-376-6216.

To Learn More about the Hanford Advisory Board:

www.hanford.gov/boards/hab/index.htm

Copies of consensus advice from the Hanford Advisory Board are available on the Hanford web page at:
<http://www.hanford.gov/boards/hab/advice/adviceindex.htm> or by contacting EnviroIssues at 509-942-1906.

Send Comments to:

Todd Martin, Chair
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Richland, Washington 99352
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Upcoming Public Involvement Opportunities

Tell Us What You Think

Revised Draft Hanford Site Solid (Radioactive and Hazardous) Waste Program Environmental Impact Statement

The U.S. Department of Energy began a 45-day public comment period on April 11 on the revised draft of the Hanford Site Solid (Radioactive and Hazardous) Waste Program Environmental Impact Statement. This revised draft will now evaluate impacts associated with the disposal of immobilized low-activity wastes from the Hanford tank waste processing along with potential environmental impacts associated with ongoing activities of the Hanford Site Solid Waste Program. The revised draft will contain analyses of additional alternatives for managing wastes (low-level waste, mixed low-level waste, and transuranic waste) generated at Hanford and received from other DOE sites. Regional public meetings will be held (see back page.) For more information contact Michael Collins, USDOE-RL, (509) 376-6536; Michael_S_Collins@rl.gov. The draft document can be viewed online at: <http://www.hanford.gov/eis/eis-0286D2>

Hanford Groundwater Remediation Strategy

The Tri-Party Agencies want your feedback on a draft strategy to protect, monitor and clean up groundwater at Hanford. The "Hanford Site Groundwater Strategy" establishes a framework for implementing groundwater protection and remediation activities. This is a strategy document – specific decisions related to groundwater will be made through the appropriate regulatory processes. The Tri-Party agencies are asking you to review the draft document and provide comments. The document can be reviewed online at: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/nwp/pdf/dgwstrategy.pdf>. The comment period is scheduled for March 24–May 7, 2003. For more information, contact Jane Hedges, Washington State Department of Ecology, (509) 736-3016; jhed461@ecy.wa.gov

Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis (EE/CA) for Disposition of Mixed Waste from the 183-H Solar Evaporation Basins (DOE/RL-2002-63)

The Tri-Party Agencies invite you to comment on this draft document from March 31 through April 29, 2003. The EE/CA discusses proposed alternatives for disposing of waste generated from fuel fabrication activities that supported reactor operations. Approximately 12,300 containers of mixed low-level waste (some containers will require treatment prior to disposal) are being temporarily stored at the Central Waste Complex, a storage facility for dangerous and mixed waste. The recommended alternative is to treat the waste that requires treatment followed by disposal at the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility. For more information, contact R. F. Guercia, USDOE-RL, (509) 376-5494; Rudolph_F_Rudy_Guercia@rl.gov; or Fred Jamison, Washington State Department address: of Ecology, (509) 736-3022; fjam461@ecy.wa.gov

Agencies Ask For Feedback on Public Involvement Activities

The Tri-Party Agencies are conducting their annual evaluation of public involvement activities and want your feedback! Are the informational materials we provide easy to understand? Are the meetings set up in a manner that make them easy to understand and easy to provide input? The agencies will take input from April 2 - May 2, 2003. To answer these questions and others about the Tri-Party Agreement public participation process, please submit the survey on line at the Department of Ecology's Web site at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/nwp/>. For more information, contact Mary Anne Wuennecke, Washington State Department of Ecology, (509) 736-3036; mwue461@ecy.wa.gov

For more information about Hanford cleanup activities, visit the following Web sites:
www.hanford.gov
www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/nwp/index.htm
Or call the Hanford Cleanup Line, 800-321-2008

E-mail vs. Postal Mail

Which do you prefer?

In order to provide you with the most timely information about Hanford cleanup and compliance activities, as well as to conserve natural resources, the Tri-Party Agencies will begin using e-mail as our primary form of notification, as well as for distributing informational materials (such as this publication.) By now you should have received a postcard that explains how you can make the switch if you would rather receive your Hanford information via e-mail. If you want to switch to e-mail, simply fill out the pre-printed card and send it back to us, postage paid. If you want to stay on the U.S. postal mail list, you don't have to do anything. If you've misplaced your postcard but would still like to switch to e-mail notification, please call the Hanford Cleanup Line, 800-321-2008. Thanks for your interest in Hanford issues!

EPA Fines USDOE

Sludge retrieval behind schedule

The Environmental Protection Agency imposed \$76,000 in fines on the U.S. Department of Energy for missing a milestone to begin removing sludge from storage basins at Hanford.

The deadline for sludge removal to start was December 31, 2003.

EPA said they were pleased with USDOE's progress in removing spent nuclear fuel from the basins (see article, page 2), but also said that progress does not make up for missing the start of sludge retrieval.

USDOE expects to begin removing the sludge next month, and expects to complete sludge retrieval by January 2004.

Hanford Advisory Board has Positions Available

Get involved in the process

The Hanford Tri-Party Agencies are seeking applications or nominations for two "public at-large" positions on the Hanford Advisory Board (HAB). The HAB provides advice and recommendations to the Hanford Tri-Party Agencies on issues relating to the cleanup of the Hanford Site.

For more information about the vacancies, the HAB, and the application process, please go to the Nuclear Waste Programs website, <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/nwp/index.html#hab> or call Max Power, Department of Ecology, (360) 407-7118.

Applications are due by 5 p.m. April 18.

Hanford Public Forum in Spokane

Hanford History and Current Cleanup Challenges

Approximately 100 people turned out for a Hanford public forum in Spokane, sponsored by the Hanford Advisory Board, Gonzaga College of Arts and Sciences, and the Gonzaga Environmental Law Caucus.

The panel discussion focused on the history and future of Hanford, one of the largest and most contaminated nuclear production sites in the country, cleanup efforts, and opportunities for public involvement.

Hanford Advisory Board members, regulatory agencies, media and the U.S. Department of Energy served as panelists for the discussion, which covered topics including waste transportation, tank waste treatment and site safety and security.

Hanford Happenings

How can you get involved?

Hanford Budget/Cleanup Priorities public meetings.

The Tri-Party Agencies will hold a series of four regional public meetings to take input on the fiscal year 2005 Hanford budget and cleanup priorities.

April 15 - Seattle, WA. The Mountaineers, 300 3rd Ave W.

April 22 - Portland, OR. Portland State Office Building, 800 NE Oregon Ave.

April 23 - Hood River, OR. Best Western Hood River Inn, 1108 E. Marina Way

April 24 - Richland, WA. Richland City Hall, Council Chambers, 505 Swift Blvd.

For more information, contact Yvonne Sherman, (509) 376-6216

Hanford Solid Waste Environmental Impact Statement public meetings

The U.S. Department of Energy is planning regional public meetings to take input on the revised Draft Hanford Solid Waste Environmental Impact Statement. Meetings are planned for Portland, Hood River, and La Grande, OR; and Seattle, Spokane, and Richland, WA. Dates and locations for these meetings are to be determined. For more information, contact Yvonne Sherman, (509) 376-6216.

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