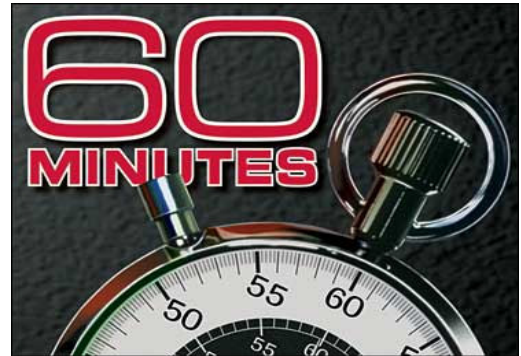


Blind eye to new Hanford High-Level Nuclear Waste tank leaks, “Vit” Plant Safety, \$7 Billion Cost Overrun confirmed by experts. CBS’ 60 Minutes Highlights 2 Reports by Heart of America Northwest

The CBS Newsmagazine 60 Minutes tonight highlighted a report by Heart of America Northwest that toxic High-Level Nuclear Waste recently leaked from tanks on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, and that the US Department of Energy (USDOE) monitoring is deliberately designed to *not* find leaks, which are moving towards the Columbia River. 60 Minutes also focused on the massive \$7 billion cost overrun and safety problems with the “vitrification” plant that the USDOE is paying Bechtel Corporation to build to turn wastes from the tanks into glass logs for stable storage.



There has been a *fifty fold increase* in highly radioactive contamination detected between two of the massive underground tanks, and contamination found underneath a third tank, which clearly indicates a leak, according to the report released by Heart of America Northwest and relied upon for tonight’s 60 Minutes Report. The USDOE, however, designates this group of single shell High-Level Nuclear Waste Tanks as “clean” and “stable”. Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman recently testified to Congress that the tanks were “stable”. USDOE told 60 Minutes that the leaks are not threatening groundwater and the Columbia River. Heart of America Northwest’s report details high radiation levels detected under the tanks from *new* leaks and all the way to groundwater. USDOE admits that, if contaminants reach groundwater, it will only take from 25 to 50 years to reach the Columbia River.

Heart of America Northwest’s report shows that there have been *new, unreported High-Level Nuclear Waste leaks* from the Single Shell Tanks, and details how the USDOE fails to have a monitoring system to detect leaks before they spread far from the tanks.

“USDOE refuses to plan to cleanup radioactive toxic contamination from leaking High-Level Nuclear Waste tanks, which is spreading to the Columbia River,” said Gerald Pollet, JD, Executive Director of the Hanford watchdog group Heart of America Northwest. The group hired geological engineer John Brodeur, who ran Hanford’s tank leak characterization effort in the mid 1990’s, to review data from recent years and the USDOE’s current plans. “Our report, based on USDOE’s documents, clearly illustrates that their program is designed to avoid ‘finding’ and reporting new tank leaks,” said Pollet. “The Energy Department’s claims on 60 Minutes, and to Congress, that High-Level Nuclear Waste Tanks are ‘stable’, that leaks are monitored and don’t threaten the Columbia River, are each false.”

Tonight’s 60 Minutes report focused on the need for complete designs and independent safety oversight before resuming construction of Hanford’s High-Level Nuclear Waste Vitrification Plant. Bechtel’s cost estimate for the plant has grown to \$11.3 Billion from an initial contract of \$4.3 Billion. Heart of America Northwest has, for several years, criticized the design-while-you-build approach, and numerous safety risks. Those flaws have also been pointed out by the GAO and Nuclear Regulatory Commission. USDOE said in tonight’s story that delays from mismanagement and cost overruns are not a problem.

More...

In response to Washington Governor Christine Gregoire's concerns that the leaking single shell tanks will not be emptied by the agreed-upon deadline, and that delays create the risk of further leaks, the Energy Department said delays were not a problem. Heart of America Northwest's report shows that USDOE's claims that the contamination is not spreading, and that the tanks are "stable" and monitored are each false. USDOE failed to report leaks despite firm evidence of increased contamination

"There have been recent tank leaks. We need to know where the contamination is, how fast it has migrated and where it is likely to go in the future," warns John Brodeur, P.E, L.E.G. USDOE's program, Brodeur's report finds, "ignores actual data that deep contamination has already reached and impacted groundwater; uses the wrong instrumentation; and, lacks essential monitoring."

In response to questions from Senator Maria Cantwell about USDOE slowing removal of waste from Single Shell Tanks at a hearing in February, Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman stated: "We monitor those tanks for any additional leakage, anything that would indicate any instability, and we find none. So there is a monitoring process that is ongoing."

Heart of America Northwest's report, on the causes of the \$7 billion cost overruns and risks of catastrophic nuclear accidents at the High-Level Nuclear Waste Vitrification Plant includes a "**Get Well Plan**" to have the plant independently regulated for nuclear safety and to control costs – starting with validated designs before USDOE keeps paying billions of dollars to Bechtel to build the plant. There is no independent nuclear safety regulation of the vitrification plant, despite serious risks, including the potential for a catastrophic nuclear accident with massive radiation releases, having been reported by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and other external experts. A report by the NRC found the *likelihood of a catastrophic nuclear accident could be as high two percent per year*. The High-Activity and Pre-Treatment portions of the plant, which have the most significant cost and safety issues, are millions of engineering hours from having completed designs. Yet, USDOE proposes to increase construction spending to \$540 million in Fiscal Years 2007 and 2008 for those portions of the plant. In a case of backwards priorities, USDOE proposes to slow funding for the one portion of the Plant which does not have significant safety or cost overrun issues (the "Low Activity Waste" Vitrification Plant, or "LAW"), and which could begin operations in 2011 in order to alleviate the threat from leaking High-Level Nuclear Waste Tanks.

Congressional Responses to evidence of tank leaks and spreading contamination:
"The public safety implications of reducing funding for waste tank retrieval are staggering, particularly considering the delays in the construction in activities to process the waste," said US Congressman Brian Baird, who represents the District downstream from Hanford on the Columbia River. "Moving waste from deteriorating tanks is a high priority and significant improvement must be made to invest in the rapid removal of this waste. Additionally, DOE's proposal to leave 10 percent of waste in tanks is misguided and dangerous."

U.S. Representatives Jay Inslee, Jim McDermott, who has highly criticized USDOE's 'design-build' approach, and Baird urged USDOE restore funding to remove waste from tanks and not downplay the risk from leaks. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) called for "accelerating" removal of waste from the leaking Single Shell Tanks; and, Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR) called for "promptly" installing leak detection and mandating a new "tank leak watch list".

Heart of America Northwest's reports on tank leaks and the High-Level Nuclear Waste Vitrification Plant are available on line at: www.hoanw.org . **For more information:** Gerald Pollet at (206)382-1014(office) or, cell: (206) 819-9015. John Brodeur will also be available for media interviews by contacting Heart of America Northwest on Monday, following the 11 AM news conference. **News Conference: Monday May 1, 11 AM** Richland, Red Lion Hotel (Hanford House) Kennewick/Pasco Room. ###