



Heart of America Northwest

The Public's Voice for Hanford Cleanup

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Hanford No Place for Nuclear Waste

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

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Special to The Spokesman-Review*

Using Hanford as a national radioactive waste dump would greatly increase groundwater contamination and health risks for future generations using the water and Columbia River. This is according to the U.S. Department of Energy's own public health and environmental review in a draft environmental impact statement.

Moreover, transportation of waste could pose a direct risk to Spokane residents.

Earlier this month, the Environmental Protection Agency released its findings that the landfill proposed to be used as a national radioactive and radioactive-chemical waste dump will contaminate groundwater many times above cancer risk standards.

With water growing scarcer in our region, the groundwater flowing under Hanford into the Columbia is a vital resource for drinking, irrigation, salmon, our economy and Native American culture.

Oregon and 21 Northwest health and environmental groups recently sent letters asking the Department of Energy to withdraw its decisions to use Hanford as a national radioactive waste dump, based on striking data from the agency's own impact statement. For example, the department's analysis projects that plutonium 239 levels in the groundwater flowing into the Columbia River will reach 300 times the drinking water standard.

The plan would send approximately 17,500 truckloads of nuclear waste, some of it very radioactive, to Hanford. That is more than two trucks a day, every day for over 20 years, rolling through our communities and past our schools. At the public hearing in Spokane, Department of Energy officials admitted that many of those trucks may come through

Spokane on Interstate 90.

In a past environmental impact statement for trucking similar wastes to Hanford, the department acknowledged that exposure to the trucks would cause fatal cancers in adults along the truck routes, even if there are no accidents or terrorist attacks. The agency's analysis of that cancer risk from exposure to the trucks did not consider health impacts on our children, who are more susceptible than adults to radiation exposure.

The Department of Energy's impact statement also fails to consider the specific hazards of trucking radioactive wastes through Spokane.

The department says, "trust us, we promise not to start shipping the wastes until Hanford's vitrification plant operates (planned for the year 2022)."

Yet, the Department of Energy refuses to make an enforceable commitment not to ship waste before that date.

We have no reason to trust the Department of Energy. The department's current plan – "preferred alternative" – is never to clean up the leaks from high-level nuclear waste tanks, instead proposing to cap the waste, and not to even characterize, much less actually retrieve and treat, the huge amount of wastes in more than 40 miles of unlined ditches in which radioactive and chemical wastes were simply dumped.

The Department of Energy designated Hanford as a national radioactive waste dump in 2000 when it was still saying that dumping radioactive waste in unlined soil ditches was OK. In 2004, the department decided to bury 3 million cubic feet of off-site waste at Hanford. These are the decisions we call on the energy secretary to withdraw.

As the state of Oregon wrote to the secretary, the department's own draft impact statement shows that adding more waste is not acceptable:

"The analysis ... shows that, no matter where at Hanford DOE proposes to dispose of off-site waste, the impacts exceed standards and are unacceptable. Moreover, the impacts from Hanford-origin wastes in these same areas already exceed standards under the most aggressive cleanup considered, leaving no room for any additional impact from off-site wastes."

Following an in-depth review of the current draft environmental impact statement, the Hanford Advisory Board unanimously opposed the importation and disposal of off-site low-level or mixed waste at Hanford "due to the high impacts to groundwater and risks from existing wastes, and the documented increase in impacts projected from offsite waste."

To protect the Columbia River and public health, Washington state should join in requiring the Department of Energy to:

- Remove the wastes from leaky single-shell tanks as fast as possible – and not delay emptying tanks until 2040.
- Clean up, not cap and cover up, contamination spreading from tank leaks and discharges.
- Clean up, not cover up, the 40 miles of unlined burial grounds
- Withdraw the decisions to use Hanford as a national radioactive waste dump.

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