

Release date: May 21, 1996  
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## **DOE REFUTES CHARGES BY HEART OF AMERICA AND GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT**

*The U.S. Department of Energy strongly refutes the allegations made today (May 21, 1996) by the Heart of America (HOA) and Government Accountability Project (GAP) regarding management of the high-level radioactive waste in underground tanks at DOE's Hanford Site in Southeastern Washington.*

*Charges of mismanagement and data manipulation to misrepresent the actual status of contamination at the tank farms are simply not true, asserted John Wagoner, DOE's manager of the Hanford Site.*

*"I want to emphasize that Jackson Kinzer is an outstanding manager. I am outraged at this unwarranted attack on his professional competence." Wagoner said. "Under Kinzer's leadership continuing progress is being made at the tank farms. His team is moving aggressively ahead to determine the extent and impacts associated with past contamination resulting from the tank wastes, and taking the steps necessary to getting on with fixing the problems," Wagoner said.*

*Data cited by HOA and GAP to support their charges distort the facts and are based on incomplete information, taken out of context, Wagoner said. "Since Kinzer came aboard to manage the tank program, we've made significant improvements. After years of inaction, we are now making great strides in getting on with the cleanup of the old nuclear weapons waste in the aging tanks."*

*Responses to specific allegations in the HOA-GAP press release are outlined below:*

*Allegation: U.S. DOE failed to disclose that nuclear waste is leaking from the tanks and is reaching the groundwater.*

*Fact: The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Tank Waste Remediation System (TWRS) Program identified that new data resulting from a DOE study authorized in 1995 was becoming available regarding tank waste leaking into the vadose zone. The findings indicate that contamination exists deeper than previously thought. However, the source of these contaminants is still under evaluation.*

*Allegation: DOE is promoting a proposal to leave waste in the tanks forever.*

*Fact: DOE and Ecology's preferred alternative for dealing with the tank waste, the Phased Implementation Alternative, in the TWRS Draft EIS is to retrieve and treat 99 percent of the tank wastes in a phased approach. The preferred alternative is consistent with the Tri-Party Agreement. Leaving approximately 75 percent of the waste in the tanks is only one of several other alternatives evaluated in the TWRS draft EIS.*

*Allegation: Hanford whistleblowers once again under attack.*

*Fact: Mr. Casey Ruud's assignment has recently been extended for an additional year to support DOE*

*on vadose zone monitoring. The contract with Rust Geotech (which employs Mr. John Brodeur) expires at the end of June 1996. Completion of the vadose zone monitoring activities is planned through Fiscal Year 1997 and 1998. The decision to extend or re-compete the vadose zone monitoring contract is currently under evaluation.*

*Allegation: DOE is slashing the budget for monitoring the vadose zone.*

*Fact: DOE plans to fully fund the current vadose zone monitoring program, and is considering expansion of these monitoring activities.*

*Allegation: DOE has not been investigating the extent and severity of the groundwater contamination.*

*Fact: DOE has thoroughly investigated the groundwater contamination under the tank farms and has engaged experts from around the country to assist in advising DOE on this important issue. The team will have its initial meeting at Hanford next week. DOE has recently briefed the Hanford Advisory Board and the Oregon Hanford Waste Board on all details regarding measured contamination around Hanford tanks which have leaked in the past.*

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*Hanford was established during the Second World War to produce plutonium from American's nuclear weapons. All weapons material production was halted in the late 1980s and the site is now engaged in the world's largest environmental cleanup project.*

*There is approximately 56 million gallons of radioactive and hazardous waste stored in 177 large underground storage tanks as well as about 60 smaller inactive miscellaneous underground tanks that are part of the tank waste transfer system at the Hanford Site.*