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DOE

## **DOE AND ECOLOGY ISSUE FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR HANFORD TANK WASTE**

The Department of Energy (DOE) and the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) today issued the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the remediation of high-level nuclear waste stored in aging tanks at the Hanford Site near Richland, Washington. The document proposes a path for tackling one of the most costly and complex environmental risks in the Nation's former nuclear weapons complex.

The preferred method for management and disposal of high level nuclear waste from Hanford's 177 underground tanks is a two phase retrieval and stabilization process. DOE and Ecology said that the phased approach would provide for long-term protection of the environment and human health, and would allow DOE to meet the requirements of the Tri- Party Agreement. It would also provide the flexibility needed to include new emerging data and technologies into DOE's tank waste remediation program in the future.

"Hanford's tank wastes are one of the nation's most serious environmental challenges," said Al Alm, Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management. "This Final Environmental Impact Statement confirms that we must continue to safely manage the tank wastes and continue to move aggressively forward with retrieval and treatment of the waste to meet President Clinton's challenge of protecting the environment for future generations."

Several public meetings were held to gather input from the general public, Tribal Nations, and agencies during the preparation of the Final EIS. DOE and Ecology considered comments received on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and made many improvements to the final document based on these comments. Comments and responses are published in the report. DOE also requested that the National Academy of Science review and provide comments on the draft EIS. DOE will consider all comments provided prior to the issuing of the Record of Decision on the tank cleanup, no sooner than 30 days after publication of the notice of availability of the Final EIS in the Federal Register.

"The Environmental Impact Statement carefully evaluates environmental impacts, regulatory compliance requirements, and worker and public health and safety" said John Wagoner, Manager of DOE's Richland Operations Office. "DOE and Ecology have partnered to prepare the Environmental Impact Statement, and that successful partnership has resulted in a common understanding of what must be done to retrieve and treat the tank waste. Our shared vision provides a solid foundation for our future tank waste work at the Hanford Site."

The Final Environmental Impact Statement evaluates the potential environmental impacts of DOE's proposed action, as well as reasonable alternatives for management and disposal of 55 million gallons of mixed, radioactive, and hazardous waste stored in 177 underground storage tanks associated with Hanford's tank farm operations. In addition, the document evaluates the management and disposal of approximately 1,930 cesium and strontium capsules currently on loan or stored at the Hanford Site.

"We believe this EIS is the first of two major steps toward cleanup needed this year," said Mary Riveland, Ecology Director. "This approach honors the spirit of the Hanford Tri-Party Agreement. It reflects the desires of the people of the Northwest to clean up the tank waste while protecting public health and the environment. The next step will be DOE's issuing contracts to private companies for design of plants to treat these wastes." The contracts are expected to be awarded within a few weeks.

DOE and Ecology have identified the No Action alternative as the preferred alternative for the capsules to allow DOE time to evaluate potential commercial and research uses of the capsules. A final decision of the disposition of the capsules is anticipated sometime in 1998.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement has been filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and has also been distributed to Federal, State, and local officials, Tribal Nations, and other interested parties. For further information on the Environmental Impact Statement, contact Ms. Carolyn Haass, TWRS EIS NEPA Document Manager, U.S. Department of Energy, Richland Operation Office, PO Box 1249, Richland, Washington 99352, or Mr. Geoff Tallent, TWRS EIS Project Lead, Washington State Department of Ecology, PO Box 47600, Olympia, Washington 98504-7600.

Copies of the environmental impact statement can be reviewed at DOE Public Reading Rooms in Richland, Seattle, and Spokane, Washington, and in Portland, Oregon. The environmental impact statement is also available for review via the Internet at "[www.hanford.gov](http://www.hanford.gov)." A copy of the environmental impact statement can also be obtained by calling the Hanford Cleanup Hotline toll free at 1-800-321-2008.

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