

DOE Nevada Helicopters to Provide Aerial Radiological Survey of Hanford

RICHLAND, Wash., March 1, 1996 -- As a part of the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) regular environmental monitoring program, two specially equipped helicopters from the DOE Nevada Operations Office (NV) will be used to perform aerial radiological surveys of the 560-square-mile Hanford Site near Richland, Washington. The blue and white BO-105 helicopters are equipped with sophisticated instruments designed to detect radiological contamination. The flights will start Thursday, February 29, and continue for about three weeks.

The helicopters will fly at a speed of 80 knots per hour at an altitude of 200 feet above the ground in a north/south grid pattern. The grid lines will be about 400 feet apart. The total air miles to be flown during this campaign is expected to exceed 8,330 miles, nearly long enough to fly from Seattle to the Orient. Although Hanford is the primary area of operations, the helicopters will also survey the shoreline of the Hanford Reach from Priest Rapids Dam to the McNary Dam. The helicopters will be based at the Pasco Airport during this campaign. A report on the findings of the aerial survey is expected to be issued in August 1996.

Paul Kruger, Director of Environment, Safety, and Health at DOE's Richland Operations Office said, "This aerial survey and the resulting report will plot radiological contamination on the Hanford Site and serve as a baseline to track any migration since the survey in 1988."

The 1988 survey showed that the external radiation dose rates were less than the normal background radiation in the Tri-Cities. The average annual dose rate at the Hanford Site was calculated at 88 millirems per year; by comparison, a chest x-ray is about 20 millirems. The average dose rate in the Tri-Cities, from normal background radiation, is 360 millirems. The 1988 report indicated that radiation levels at publicly accessible lands near the 100 Areas, which are known to be higher than background due to past Hanford operations, have decreased since a similar study was done in 1978. The decreases were attributed to the end of plutonium production and the normal decay of radionuclides. The 1996 report is also expected to show a decrease in radiation levels.

This is the fifth aerial survey in Hanford's history. The flights, which will only be conducted during the daytime for safety reasons, are coordinated with the Federal Aviation Administration and other appropriate agencies.

"The survey is a part of an ongoing DOE environmental monitoring program. During the past 30 years, hundreds of similar surveys have been conducted at DOE sites across the nation," explained Kruger.

Flight crews from Bechtel Nevada Corporation, the main contractor at DOE - NV, will conduct the survey. Special precautions are being taken during these flights to ensure that nesting bald eagles are not disturbed.

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