
6.0 Groundwater and Vadose Zone Monitoring

6.0.1 Groundwater Monitoring

During 1996, groundwater monitoring activities at the Hanford Site were restructured into the Hanford Groundwater Monitoring Project. This project incorporates sitewide groundwater monitoring mandated by U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Orders and previously performed under the Groundwater Surveillance Project, with near-field groundwater monitoring conducted to ensure that operations in and around specific waste disposal facilities are in compliance with applicable regulations. The objectives of integrating these activities were to improve efficiency of monitoring activities and increase the consistency of interpretations of the groundwater flow system and contaminant distributions.

Collection and analysis of groundwater samples to determine the distributions of radiological and chemical constituents were major parts of the groundwater monitoring effort. In addition, hydrogeologic characterization and modeling of the groundwater flow system were used to assess the monitoring network and to evaluate potential impacts of Hanford Site groundwater contamination. Other activities are data management, interpretation, and reporting. The purpose of this section is to provide an overall summary of groundwater monitoring during 1997. Additional details concerning the Hanford Groundwater Monitoring Project are available in PNNL-11793.

6.0.1.1 Monitoring Objectives

Groundwater monitoring was conducted for the following:

- assess the impact of radiological and hazardous chemicals on groundwater as a result of Hanford Site operations
- provide an integrated assessment of groundwater quality on the Hanford Site
- evaluate potential offsite impacts from the groundwater pathway

- verify compliance with applicable environmental laws and regulations
- evaluate effectiveness of groundwater remediation activities
- identify new or existing groundwater quality problems.

Sitewide groundwater monitoring activities are designed to meet the project objectives stated in DOE Order 5400.1 and described above. The impacts of Hanford Site operations on groundwater have been monitored for more than 50 years under this project and its predecessors. Near-field monitoring of groundwater around specific waste facilities was performed to meet the requirements of Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 265 (40 CFR 265) and Washington Administrative Codes (WACs) 173-303 and 173-304 as well as applicable DOE Orders (e.g., 5400.1, 5400.5). Groundwater monitoring was also performed in conjunction with cleanup investigations under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (40 CFR 300).

6.0.1.2 Monitoring Design

Various criteria were used to design groundwater monitoring. Specific chemicals and radionuclides analyzed at each monitoring well and their sampling frequencies were selected based on past waste disposal activities (PNL-6456, WHC-EP-0527-2) and on previous analysis results. Information on the location of potential contaminant sources and hydrogeology, including groundwater flow directions, was also considered. Selections also involved determining those chemicals and radionuclides important in assessing health risk and for understanding contaminant distribution and movement. Groundwater monitoring was designed to satisfy regulatory requirements.

Groundwater surveillance was conducted using established quality assurance plans (see Section 8.0, "Quality Assurance") and written procedures (WHC-CM-4-2).

Computerized data management systems are used to schedule sampling activities; generate sample labels and chain-of-custody forms; track sample status; and load, store, report, and evaluate data. The Hanford Environmental Information System is the central consolidated database for storing and managing the groundwater results.

Groundwater samples were collected from both the unconfined and upper confined aquifers. The unconfined aquifer was monitored extensively because it contains contaminants from Hanford Site operations (PNNL-11793) and provides a potential pathway for contaminants to reach points of human exposure (e.g., water supply wells, Columbia River). The upper confined aquifer was monitored, though less extensively than the unconfined aquifer, because it also provides a potential pathway for contaminants to migrate off the Hanford Site. Also, some sampling was conducted at the request of the Washington State Department of Health.

Contaminant source areas were monitored to characterize and define trends in the condition of the groundwater and to identify and quantify existing, emerging, or potential problems in groundwater quality. Source areas included active waste disposal facilities or facilities that had generated or received wastes in the past. Most of these facilities are located within the 100, 200, and 300 Areas. However, some sources such as the Solid Waste Landfill are located outside the operational areas.

Wells located within known contaminant plumes were monitored to characterize and define trends in the concentrations of the associated radiological or chemical constituents. These wells were also monitored to quantify existing groundwater quality problems and to provide a baseline of environmental conditions against which future changes can be assessed. Even though releases of waste to most disposal facilities have ceased, these wells will continue to be monitored as cleanup of the Hanford Site continues. This will provide a continuing assessment of the effect of remediation efforts on groundwater.

Water supplies on and near the Hanford Site potentially provide the most direct route for human exposure to contaminants in groundwater. In 1997, 3 of the site's 12 drinking water systems provided groundwater for human consumption on the Hanford Site. One system supplied water at the Fast Flux Test Facility, one supplied water to personnel at the Yakima Barricade guardhouse, and one was located at the Hanford Patrol Training Academy (see Section 4.3, "Hanford Site Drinking Water Surveillance"). Water supply wells used by the city of Richland

are located near the Hanford Site's southern boundary. Monitoring wells near these water systems were routinely sampled to ensure that any potential water quality problems would be identified long before regulatory limits were reached.

To assess the impact of Hanford Site operations on groundwater quality, background conditions, or the quality of groundwater on the Hanford Site unaffected by operations, must be known. Data on the concentration of contaminants of concern in groundwater that existed before Hanford Site operations began are not available. Therefore, concentrations of naturally occurring chemical and radiological constituents in groundwater sampled from wells located in areas unaffected by Hanford Site operations, including upgradient locations, provide the best estimate of pre-Hanford groundwater quality. A summary of background conditions is tabulated in PNL-6886 and PNL-7120.

Groundwater samples are collected at various frequencies, depending on the historical trends of constituent data, regulatory or compliance requirements, and characterization requirements. Sampling frequencies range from monthly to annually.

Summary results for 1997 are discussed in Section 6.1, "Hanford Groundwater Monitoring Project."

6.0.2 Vadose Zone Monitoring

The vadose zone is defined as the area between the ground surface and the water table. This subsurface zone is also referred to as the unsaturated zone, zone of suspended water, or zone of aeration. The vadose zone functions as a transport pathway or storage area for water and other materials located between the soil surface and the groundwater aquifers. Historically, the vadose zone at the Hanford Site has been contaminated with large amounts of radioactive and nonradioactive materials through the intentional and unintentional discharge of liquid wastes to the soil column, the burial of contaminated solid wastes, and the deposition of airborne contaminants to the ground. Depending on the makeup of the soil, the geology of the area, the nature of the wastes, the amount of water or other fluids available to mobilize the contaminant, and other factors, contaminants can move downward and laterally through the soil column, can be chemically bound to soil particles (and immobilized), or can be contained by geologic formations.

Because of concerns of the impact of some vadose zone contaminants on the groundwater beneath the Hanford Site, and the potential for contaminated groundwater to reach the Columbia River, characterization efforts are under way to learn more about the nature and extent of vadose zone contamination. At Hanford, the primary method for investigating radiological contamination in the vadose zone consists of borehole logging (monitoring radiation levels in narrow shafts bored or drilled into the soil column). Borehole logging is being conducted in existing boreholes located in and around the 200 Areas single-shell tank farms and beneath former waste disposal

facilities also in or near the 200 Areas. Additionally, soil-vapor extraction and monitoring are being conducted as part of an expedited response action in the 200-West Area to remove carbon tetrachloride from the vadose zone.

Results for the 1997 vadose zone monitoring program are discussed in Section 6.2, "Vadose Zone Characterization and Monitoring." Section 6.2 has been divided into vadose zone characterization activities in the 200 Areas tank farms and the vadose zone monitoring beneath former 200 Areas waste disposal facilities and carbon tetrachloride remediation work in the 200-West Area.