

Draft Advice (v2): Vapor Exposure Issues on Worker Health and Safety

Adopted by HSEP Committee consensus 1.7.14

Background

The Hanford Advisory Board (Board) has always advocated for robust protections for worker health and safety at the Hanford Site. The tank vapor issue has been a problem for decades and subject to many studies and independent assessments. The Board is concerned about the consequences of worker exposures to chemical vapors in Hanford's tank farms.

Beginning in March 2014, numerous tank farm workers experienced potential exposures to chemical vapors. The Hanford Site medical provider (HPM Corporation) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) - Office of River Protection gave presentations in May 2014 to the Board's Health, Safety and Environmental Protection Committee. The presentations identified actions to address the increase in reported exposures. In response to ongoing exposures, Washington River Protection Solutions (WRPS), DOE's tank farm contractor, commissioned the Savannah River National Laboratory (SRNL) to determine the adequacy of the tank farm vapor protection program and provide recommendations. The [Hanford Tank Vapor Assessment Report](#)¹ was released in October 2014 and the Board was briefed on the results and WRPS' initial actions.

The Board provides the following advice on worker health and safety issues related to chemical vapor exposures while WRPS develops its implementation plan regarding the SRNL recommendations.

Advice

- The Board advises DOE to ensure that proper personal protection equipment is made available to all tank farm workers in a timely fashion.
- The Board advises DOE to conduct a follow-up evaluation to identify any long-term health effects for employees that have reported an exposure to chemical vapors over the past 20 years. DOE should use this data as a basis for an appropriately designed epidemiological study of long-term health effects from chemical vapor exposures, as recommended by the SRNL Report.
- The Board supports accelerated implementation of engineering technologies to detect and control vapor emissions and exposures.
- The Board advises DOE to issue strong guidance to their third-party insurance administrator in support of worker compensation claims associated with chemical vapor exposure and ensure workers have timely access to appropriate specialists. The Board advises DOE to provide clear communication with workers and the public following vapor exposures.

¹ *Hanford Tank Vapor Assessment Report*, SNRL-RP-2014-00791, Rev 0, October 30, 2014.
http://srnl.doe.gov/documents/Hanford_TVAT_Report_2014-10-30-FINAL.pdf