

Introduction to Safety Culture Advice

Thursday, June 7, 2012

As expressed in past advice, and in draft advice being proposed today, the safe and effective treatment of Hanford's tank waste through vitrification, is a priority for the Hanford Advisory Board. The cornerstone of vitrification is the Waste Treatment Plant. We all want the WTP to work safely and effectively.

The Tank Waste Committee and the Health Safety and Environmental Protection Committee are bringing this advice forward today in response to many reports, recommendations, investigations, action plans, and implementation plans related to the WTP, that call into question its' ability to work safely and effectively. We've read reports by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, DOE's Office of Health, Safety and Security, and others who have looked into the role safety culture has played and found a disconcerting link between the inability of employees to raise concerns and the existence of unresolved technical issues.

The first step to healing a problem, is admitting there is a problem, and we commend DOE for taking the safety culture issues seriously. We're encouraged by the efforts both DOE Headquarters and DOE ORP have taken to acknowledge the broken safety culture. ORP has developed a safety culture improvement plan that is an important first step towards meaningful reform. And at a recent DNFSB hearing, David Huizenga said that the DOE is "On the road to recovery. We are admitting we have issues. We accept the fact that we have issues that need to be dealt with and take actions to address them."

Our draft advice offers suggestions for how to address the broken safety culture and put the WTP back on track.

The joint-committee process to write this advice started in September of 2011. We've been hard at work for 8 months discussing safety culture issues and technical concerns, and figuring out how to frame the advice. This long process culminated in a two-day joint meeting in April, to talk through our concerns and work in small groups to write advice points. Typically issue managers are tagged to take the committee conversations and draft advice with the help of a handful of people. I want to take a minute and have everyone, all of the issue managers and everyone who attended the two-day meeting to write this advice to please stand up.

You can sit down, thank you.

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From being intimately involved in the committee meetings, issue manager meetings, phone calls, sounding board framing meetings, and advice writing process, it is very clear to me that the Board is passionate about DOE and its contractors finding safe and effective solutions to the challenges posed by the Waste Treatment Plant.

I know I'm not alone in hoping that this is the meeting where safety culture advice is finally passed.

Thank you.

Keith, do you have anything to add?