

Department of Energy Releases Proposal to Amend the Hanford Consent Decree

RICHLAND, Wash. – For more than 40 years, facilities at the [Hanford site](#) in the State of Washington produced plutonium critical to the nation’s defense during World War II and throughout the Cold War. This effort resulted in the production of 56 million gallons of radioactive and chemical wastes, which are currently stored in 177 underground tanks. The [Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant \(WTP\)](#) is a massive and complex first-of-a-kind plant that will be the cornerstone to completing the cleanup of this tank waste at Hanford.

Two agreements govern the cleanup of the Hanford site, the 2010 Consent Decree and the 1989 Hanford Federal Facility Agreement and Consent Order — also known as the Tri-Party Agreement. The Consent Decree has a number of milestones associated with the completion of the WTP. However, since the Consent Decree was entered, extensive analysis by DOE and independent experts has shown that the WTP as currently designed cannot be assured for 40 years of safe operation. A new approach is needed.

Today, the Department presented the State of Washington with [a proposal](#) to amend the Consent Decree. The Department is proposing a phased approach to treating and immobilizing tank waste by moving forward on the mostly liquid portion of the tank waste, while continuing work to resolve technical issues. The proposal provides a set of near-term, fixed milestones for certain activities and sets forth a transparent process with timeframes for establishing additional milestones once the technical issues are resolved. This plan will require that some additional facilities will be needed, one for pretreating the low level waste and another for mixing, sampling and feeding the high level waste.

We have made tremendous progress in the cleanup of the Hanford site over the past 25 years, but we recognize we still have a long way to go. While we share the same sense of urgency as the States of Washington and Oregon, and members of the public to safely complete this mission, we also recognize that thoughtful decision-making and actions in the near-term will build the foundation for a stronger, more sustainable, and durable tank waste cleanup mission at Hanford.