

Initiative would thwart DOE plans for waste shipments

Watchdog groups, including Heart of America Northwest and the Government Accountability Project, filed an initiative a week ago to halt shipments of nuclear waste to Hanford. At least 197,000 valid signatures are required by the end of the year to qualify the measure for the November 2004 ballot.

The initiative would block new state permits for facilities to store waste from other states. Current plans of the Department of Energy call for various wastes from other sites to be packaged at Hanford and shipped to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico for permanent disposal.

Opponents of the initiative say it would face costly legal challenges and could, if it were eventually enacted, establish the right of other states such as New Mexico and Nevada to refuse Hanford waste. The *Tri-City Herald* wrote in a June 10 editorial, "Managing Hanford cleanup by popular vote isn't just an absurd idea, it's dangerous."

State Senator Pat Hale, a Fluor Hanford employee, said state laws are already adequate for regulating Hanford waste without the new rules contained in the initiative. "The state has clear regulatory authority over the site," she said. "I think the initiative is totally unnecessary." ■