

State, DOE agree on proposed TPA changes

The Department of Energy Office of River Protection and the Washington State Department of Ecology have reached an agreement on several changes to dates specified in the Tri-Party Agreement for constructing, testing and operating Hanford's Waste Treatment Plant.

One proposed TPA change would mean that the date when the parties would determine how to treat the bulk of Hanford's tank waste would be a decade sooner. Other changes would modify the testing, or commissioning, phase of the project and the milestone dates for completing key construction activities.

"The Waste Treatment Plant is the cornerstone of our tank waste cleanup at Hanford," said Roy Schepens, ORP manager. "These changes to the TPA keep us on the path to meet the critical milestone dates for starting operations in 2011, and completing tank-waste treatment by the original TPA date of 2028. A third critical date, for completing the treatment of 10 percent of the waste by 2018, also does not change under this agreement."

The agreement requires ORP to report by January 2005 on waste-treatment technologies that may be used in combination with the WTP for treating the low-activity waste. That report is to include information on the technical, financial and contractual aspects of the so-called "supplemental treatment," as well as a proposed schedule for implementing it.

ORP and tank-farm contractor CH2M HILL Hanford Group are evaluating bulk vitrification, steam reforming and containerized cast stone for supplemental treatment ("Three supplemental treatment methods in the running," *Hanford Reach*, June 16). Each of the technologies has been used successfully in other applications but has not yet been fully evaluated with Hanford tank waste.

After DOE submits its report on treatment strategies, it will negotiate a final treatment baseline with Ecology, incorporating the combination of the WTP and supplemental treatment to complete the tank-waste cleanup mission by 2028.

"This milestone greatly accelerates our process for determining how DOE will complete the treatment of Hanford's tank waste by the TPA milestone date," said Schepens. "The original date for providing a proposal on treating the remainder of Hanford's tank waste was 2014. By submitting the supplemental technologies report in 2005, and agreeing to a baseline in 2006, we've advanced our decision-making by nearly a decade."

The updated strategy will employ a multifaceted waste-treatment approach using a single WTP with two high-capacity high-level waste melters, two high-capacity low-activity waste melters, and supplemental treatment technologies to treat the remaining low-activity tank waste.

"Adding the second melter now rather than later increases the likelihood that all high-level tank waste can be treated by 2028, which is a high priority for the state," said Tom Fitzsimmons, the state's director of Ecology. "The proposed changes also will let us know sooner which alternative treatment technologies might work — and if they don't work, we vitrify."

The proposed changes to the TPA also modify interim construction milestones and incorporate a change in the testing, or commissioning, phase. A public comment period on the proposal will begin July 28 and close Sept. 10. ■