

## 'Reaching' back:

# The stories we reported on

**1990** It was near the end of the year that the *Hanford Reach* began publication.

The big news that year was the presence of the Department of Energy "Tiger Teams" on site, evaluating Hanford operations from top to bottom. Waste Tank SY-101 was also newsworthy for its habit of "burping" flammable gases.

The year also saw the beginning of an office-space "crunch" that continued for the next several years.

**1991** John Wagoner replaced Mike Lawrence as DOE's Hanford manager, a position he would hold for most of the decade. Prime Hanford contractor Westinghouse Hanford established the popular 8-9s work schedule north of the Wye Barricade.

It was also the year Westinghouse determined the cause of SY-101's "burping" behavior. And, prompted by alarm-tampering incidents, Hanford workers participated in restructuring the Job Control System. Lock-and-tag incidents also made news that year, and the Employee Concerns program was strengthened with renewed emphasis and a provision for third-party review.

**1992** Security was relaxed in 1992, and the number of security clearances was greatly reduced. The Westinghouse Hanford contract was extended, and cost savings became a top priority. Expedited Response Actions were initiated to speed the cleanup in some contaminated areas of the site.

Progress in understanding the chemistry of Tank SY-101 moved the site closer to solving this major safety concern. And the Fast Flux Test Facility, which had been setting performance records for years, was operated for the last time.

**1993** There was a year-long celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Hanford Site in 1993. A mixer pump was installed in SY-101 to prevent the periodic venting of gases.

Worker safety became the number-one priority after a fatal accident in a valve pit. In another incident, dubbed the rock-on-a rope caper, workers were contaminated by using a crude method of measuring the waste level in an underground tank. That year, safety became a condition of employment for Hanford workers.



**PUTTING THE LAST ISSUE TO BED:** The staff of the *Hanford Reach* — from left, associate editor Cornelia Brim, editor Dennis Cresswell and designer Sally Green — plan the finishing touches for the final issue of the *Reach*. The staff put their combined total of 23 years of *Hanford Reach* experience to work each week to compile, edit, write and design the paper. "We could not have produced the *Reach* without the weekly efforts of communications specialists, photographers, printers and the mail service," Cresswell said. See "Behind-the-scenes specialists helped put out the *Reach*" beginning on page 8 of this issue to learn about the *Reach*'s supporting cast.

**1994** This was the year of the turnaround in Hanford's safety culture, resulting in a major improvement in injury statistics.

Ground was broken twice on the Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory after the first location that was chosen turned out to be a major Native American cultural site. Spent fuel in the K Basins near the Columbia River became a high-priority concern.

The *Hanford Reach*, which had been directed to employees of Westinghouse Hanford and its subcontractors up until 1994, became a site-wide publication for all Hanford workers. There were fewer of us, however, as budget cuts and reductions of force began.

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## The stories we reported on, cont.

**1995** Budgetary and staff reductions continued in 1995. There was now an overabundance of office space, which had been in short supply while Hanford employment was growing. “Contract reform” and “privatization” were terms that appeared in print frequently, as well as “reinventing government,” an Al Gore initiative, and “reengineering,” a concept that Westinghouse employed to reduce costs.

Progress was made in preparing for moving spent nuclear fuel from the K Basins.

**1996** The largest-ever headline in the *Reach* proclaimed “It’s FLUOR,” announcing the award of the prime cleanup contract to Fluor Daniel Hanford (now Fluor Hanford). Bechtel was awarded the Environmental Restoration Contract. And a “privatized” contract for design and construction of a tank-waste vitrification facility was awarded to BNFL Inc.

The Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility opened for business, and the cleanup became more visible as tons of contaminated soil and other materials were placed in the ERDF.

The Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory opened on the campus of the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

**1997** Deactivating the Plutonium-Uranium Extraction (PUREX) facility was a major cleanup milestone in 1997. B Plant, the next major facility in line, moved closer to deactivation.

A 1997 chemical explosion at the Plutonium Reclamation Facility focused attention on strengthening emergency procedures. Responsibility for the 300 Area was transferred to Bechtel Hanford to begin decontamination and decommissioning activities. And the Department of Energy officially placed FFTF in standby status for a possible restart.

The EMSL received its first supercomputer that year. And the Volpentest HAMMER Training and Education Center opened its doors.

**1998** Bechtel finished “cocooning” C Reactor in 1998, and B Plant was deactivated by Fluor Hanford. DOE-RL Manager John Wagoner bid farewell to the site, to be replaced by Keith Klein.

Groundwater contamination was given a higher priority than ever before. In the safety arena, the Voluntary Protection Program and the Integrated Safety Management System emphasized increased employee involvement in creating safer workplaces.

Congress created the Office of River Protection to safeguard the Columbia, and BNFL Inc. signed a privatized contract to build the Waste Treatment Plant for glassifying Hanford’s tank wastes.

**1999** Beginning in 1999, new Hanford Manager Keith Klein’s initiative, “The River, the Plateau, the Future,” summarized DOE’s cleanup strategy for the site. The first spent nuclear fuel was moved from the K Basins to safe storage away from the river. Full-scale stabilization of plutonium began at the Plutonium Finishing Plant.

Dick French was named to head the Office of River Protection, and CH2M HILL Hanford Group completed the tank-farm upgrades needed to accelerate the removal of waste from older single-shell tanks to newer, safer, double-shell tanks.

**2000** What did *not* happen in 2000, thanks to careful planning by Lockheed Martin Information Technology and all site organizations, was anything negative related to the millennium bug, or “Y2K.”

The first waste to leave Hanford was shipped that year to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico. Three major stabilization processes began at PFP. Tank SY-101 was declared safe and taken off a congressional “watch list.” And DOE ordered the shutdown of FFTF.

That summer, a major Hanford fire damaged the ecosystem of the Fitzner-Eberhardt Arid Lands Ecology Reserve.

ORP terminated its relationship with BNFL Inc., and a more conventional government contract was awarded to a consortium of Bechtel National and Washington Group for design and construction of the vitrification plant. Harry Boston moved from DOE-RL to replace Dick French as ORP manager.

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**2001** Tank SY-101 was returned to service in 2001. The congressional watch list of problem tanks was closed — a sign that tremendous progress had been made in eliminating the risks. The Spent Nuclear Fuel Project reached a milestone by moving its 40th Multi-Canister Overpack by the end of the year.

The events of Sept. 11 changed the security posture of the site and prompted efforts by employees to help those directly affected by the tragedy. Employees participated in a community-wide drive, borrowing the World War II “Day’s Pay” theme, to purchase a new ladder truck for the New York Fire Department.

**2002** Last year, construction began on the multi-billion-dollar Waste Treatment Plant, and construction was completed on a much smaller project, the Cold Test Facility for the training of tank-farm workers.

DOE transferred FFTF from its Office of Nuclear Energy to Environmental Management, confirming its intent to proceed with deactivation of the reactor. Progress at PFP included completion of stabilizing activities on three major types of materials. The Environmental Restoration Contractor team finished cocooning DR Reactor.

**2003** This has been a year of cleanup milestones. The Environmental Restoration Contractor team, led by Bechtel Hanford, delivered its 4-millionth ton of contaminated material to ERDF. Fluor Hanford surpassed 1,252 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel removed from the K Basins. PFP completed packaging all plutonium-bearing residues. And CH2M HILL Hanford Group removed 98 percent of the pumpable liquid wastes from 29 single-shell tanks.

DOE approved plans for the Waste Treatment Plant and gave the go-ahead for full-scale construction. The project is progressing on pace.

T Plant, the only former Hanford processing facility that still has an important mission, celebrated its 60th anniversary this year. And, finally, PNNL’s EMSL facility received a new supercomputer to replace the one installed in 1996.

This year isn’t over yet, however, and we regret that the *Reach* won’t be reporting on the many stories to come. ■

### SANDY SAGE: Back in the Bottle



**A MUCH EARLIER FAREWELL:** Our thanks to Don Sorenson of the Plutonium Finishing Plant for providing this “Sandy Sage” cartoon from the final issue of Hanford’s wartime site-wide publication, *The Sage Sentinel*. It was published on Feb. 14, 1945. Except for the misspelling of buses and the reference to barracks and mess halls, it expresses the sentiments of the *Reach* staff — “We’ve had a lot of fun and met a bunch of swell people.”