

Ecology completes inspection of low-level burial grounds

After two months of inspection work, the Washington State Department of Ecology has concluded that the Department of Energy Richland Operations Office and Hanford contractor Fluor Hanford are disposing of waste in the site's low-level burial grounds in compliance with all applicable regulations.

The purpose of the inspection was to ensure that DOE-RL and Fluor Hanford are disposing of mixed waste in compliance with state requirements. The low-level burial grounds, part of Hanford's central plateau, are used for disposal and storage of low-level, mixed low-level and transuranic wastes. The waste may consist of such materials as contaminated dirt, clothing, rubble, debris and tools. Since its operation began in 1999, approximately 1,000 cubic meters of mixed low-level waste have been characterized and disposed of in the mixed low-level waste trench.

"For the past few years we have intensified our data review systems and identified areas where we could improve our waste characterization," said Beth Bilson, DOE-RL assistant manager for Environmental Restoration and Waste Management. "The positive outcome of the inspection confirms that our new system is working well — and I'm very pleased."

"The results of the inspection represent progress in the Department of Energy's management of the low-level burial grounds," said Fred Jamison of Ecology's nuclear waste program. "We will continue working with the department to characterize burial-ground waste that needs to be retrieved, treated and removed from Hanford."

The low-level burial grounds currently contain approximately 300,000 cubic meters of waste. ♦