

Citizens, HAB urge DOE to 'B' active in museum effort

Behind a move to preserve an important piece of Hanford history is the B Reactor Museum Association, a 115-member regional organization. The association promotes the education, public visitation, restoration and exhibition of B Reactor.

While some tours are given at B Reactor, association president Gene Weisskopf hopes the 58-year-old plutonium production facility will become a high-profile national historic museum to join other eastern Washington attractions.

"With the Grand Coulee Dam, a rich Native American culture, agriculture and the world's first nuclear reactor here, it could be part of a very attractive tourism package," Weisskopf said. "Bechtel deserves to take a bow. They are the ones cleaning up the B Reactor, maintaining the facility and making tours possible."

For skeptics who believe interest in the B Reactor is weak, Weisskopf believes it's due to a lack of historical resources to draw people to Hanford's past. "When I first moved here in 1995, I found out that a lot of people didn't know why we had nuclear reactors out here in the first place. But my gut feeling tells me that there would be huge international interest."

Limited tours

Due to budget and scope constraints, tours are provided on a limited basis to technical groups and for educational purposes. But a recent document, the *Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis for the 105-B Reactor Facility*, could have a profound impact on the reactor's future. The 55-page proposed cleanup plan provides three potential options for the structure and surrounding landscape:

- No action
- Surveillance and maintenance
- Hazard mitigation for public access.

The no-action option would halt further cleanup of the facility, but Hanford Site controls would still be in place. A surveillance-and-maintenance strategy would continue for another 10 years the work already being done. Hazard mitigation for public access includes full preparation of B Reactor for visitors.

Public input

Public comment on the engineering and cost analyses will be accepted until July 17. Meanwhile, a public meeting is scheduled for June 26 from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Richland Public Library's Doris Roberts Gallery.

"The Environmental Protection Agency is supportive of B Reactor becoming a museum," said Dennis Faulk, project manager for EPA. "Although the Engineering Evaluation and Cost Analysis does not make the reactor a museum, completing hazard mitigation is a step in the right direction."

While the B Reactor Museum Association strongly supports B Reactor as a potential museum, Weisskopf is quick to point out that the association is not the B Reactor's usage authority. "If the B Reactor were to become a museum, it would rely heavily on the support of the government and local people. I'm not an expert on the design of museums, but I think that the community can come up with some pretty good ideas on what they want to do with the B Reactor."

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The Hanford Advisory Board stated its advice in a June 8 letter sent to DOE Richland Operations Manager Keith Klein and the other Tri-Party Agreement signatories. The HAB letter laid the groundwork for the board's ideas on the B Reactor.

The letter supported the "hazards mitigation for public access" option. The HAB endorsed future surveillance and maintenance, mitigation of hazardous substances and allowing public access into more sections of the facility.

Sharing history

On June 9, the museum association sponsored a tour of the reactor for about 80 members and guests. The Saturday event also included dedication of a new flagpole. "For me it was a great opportunity to share the experience," said Bechtel's Tom Marceau, who gave commentary during the bus ride to and from B Reactor.

"My mom came out from Massachusetts, and is 81 years old," Marceau added. "She is from the World War II generation, so the reactor has a special meaning for her. Those are the people who made its history, and they are slowly dying off. Something needs to be done now to preserve the landmark so it can be enjoyed while they are still with us."

With the recent rise of World War II movies, documentaries, publications and memorial tributes, Weisskopf predicts the B Reactor will provide a glimpse of the Hanford Site's contribution to world history and the war's conclusion. A section about the B Reactor is included in an online DOE book titled *History of the Plutonium Production Facilities at the Hanford Site Historic District, 1943-1990*. The document can be found at www.hanford.gov/docs/rl-97-1047/.

"Unfortunately, our country views the Hanford Site as a cleanup project dealing with nuclear waste that has something to do with World War II," Weisskopf said. "When all the buildings at Hanford are torn down and the land is brought back to its original form, the B Reactor will still stand. The B Reactor is the only legacy left to one of the greatest feats in human history, and should be celebrated as such." ♦