



**For Immediate Release:**  
January 9, 2025

**Media Contacts:**

**Geoffrey Tyree**, U.S. Department of Energy, [Geoffrey.Tyree@rl.doe.gov](mailto:Geoffrey.Tyree@rl.doe.gov), 509-308-4287

**Ryan Miller**, Washington Department of Ecology, [Ryan.Miller@ecy.wa.gov](mailto:Ryan.Miller@ecy.wa.gov), 509-537-2228

**Beth Clemons**, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, [Clemons.Beth@epa.gov](mailto:Clemons.Beth@epa.gov), 206-473-7106

## **State of Washington, federal agencies finalize agreement on future of tank waste cleanup at Hanford Site**

*Amendments to cleanup agreements finalized following public input process*

**RICHLAND, Wash.** – Today, the U.S. Department of Energy (USDOE), Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology), and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized a landmark agreement that outlines a realistic and achievable course for cleaning up millions of gallons of radioactive and chemical waste from large, underground tanks at the Hanford Site.

The [final agreement](#) comes after the agencies sought and considered public and tribal input in 2024 on proposed new and revised cleanup deadlines in the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) and *Washington v. U.S. Dept. of Energy* consent decree.

Following voluntary, mediated negotiations that began in 2020, also known as Holistic Negotiations, the agencies signed a settlement agreement in April 2024 with the proposed TPA and consent decree changes.

The agencies held a public involvement effort in spring and summer 2024 to obtain feedback on the proposed changes, which included a 30-day preview, 90-day public comment period, and three hybrid (both in-person and virtual) public meetings across Washington and Oregon.

The agencies also offered consultation to the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Nez Perce Tribe, and the Wanapum Band.

The finalized changes uphold a shared commitment to the safe and effective cleanup of tank waste. Highlights include:

- Maintaining existing timeframes for starting treatment of both low-activity waste (2025) and high-level waste (2033) by immobilizing it in glass via vitrification
- Using a direct-feed approach for immobilizing high-level waste in glass, [similar to the Direct-Feed Low-Activity Waste Program](#)
- Building a vault storage system and second effluent management facility to support treating high-level waste
- Retrieving waste from 22 tanks in Hanford's 200 West Area by 2040, including grouting the low-activity portion of the waste for offsite disposal.
- Designing and constructing 1-million gallons of additional capacity for multi-purpose storage of tank waste
- Evaluating and developing new technologies for retrieving waste from tanks

Under the settlement agreement, USDOE also committed to refrain from applying its interpretation of what constitutes “high-level waste” when disposing of treated waste or closing tank systems at Hanford.

The agencies collected 185 comments during the public comment period, all of which were considered by the agencies prior to issuing a [comment responsiveness summary](#) and finalizing the agreement. Comments received from Tribes were responded to via letter.

In response to comments received, USDOE has agreed to hold a 30-day review and comment period associated with the proposed plan for retrieving, grouting, and transporting some of Hanford’s low-activity tank waste for out-of-state disposal.

The USDOE-led 30-day comment period on this draft *National Environmental Policy Act* Supplement Analysis is anticipated to begin later this year.

The agencies revised the due dates for several of the proposed milestones to allow additional time for this public involvement process. One of these is the deadline for USDOE’s decision on where to grout the waste, which is now the end of 2025.

Following the issuance of the public comment responsiveness summary last month, the agencies implemented the TPA revisions, and the federal district court approved the amended consent decree.

- [Read the public comment responsiveness summary](#)
- [Read the changes to the Tri-Party Agreement and consent decree](#)

#### **Statements from TPA agency leadership:**

**Brian Vance, Hanford Field Office Manager:** “This historic agreement, reached through years of negotiations with our Tri-Party Agreement partners from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington Department of Ecology establishes an achievable plan for our Hanford tank waste mission for the next 15 years. DOE also appreciates the time and effort that the public, stakeholders and Tribes took to review and provide comment on the agreement.”

**Laura Watson, Ecology Director:** “Cleaning up Hanford’s tank waste is critical for Washington state. With this final agreement, we’ve created a durable framework that will accelerate work while maintaining safety. More tank waste will get retrieved, treated, and disposed through 2040 and beyond. This is the best way to ensure surrounding communities and the Columbia River are protected.”

**Dan Opalski, Deputy Regional Administrator, EPA Region 10:** “Tank waste disposal is a critical part of the Hanford cleanup efforts. This landmark agreement represents successful collaboration between the Tri-Party agencies, as well as input from the public and Tribes. Thanks to all involved, the safe disposal of tank waste will proceed for years to come.”

#### **Background**

Producing plutonium at the Hanford Site left a legacy of about 56 million gallons of radioactive and chemically hazardous waste stored in 177 underground tanks. USDOE is responsible for the Hanford Site and its cleanup. Ecology and EPA are regulatory agencies overseeing USDOE’s cleanup under the Tri-Party Agreement, a judicial consent decree, and various permits.

For background information on Hanford, visit [USDOE’s Hanford website](#) and [Ecology’s website](#).

---

STAY CONNECTED:

