

ANNOUNCEMENT

Department of Energy
Richland Operations Office
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RL No.: 21-023

Issued: 4/29/2021

To: DOE FEDERAL/GSSC EMPLOYEES

Subject: TANK B-109 LIKELY LEAKING, NO INCREASED HEALTH OR SAFETY RISK

Today, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is notifying the Washington State Department of Ecology and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that underground single-shell tank B-109 is likely leaking to the soil beneath the tank. There is no increased health or safety risk to Hanford workers or the public.

Contamination in this area is not a new issue and mitigation actions have been in place for decades. Active groundwater treatment systems operating in the B Complex area were installed several years ago to capture and treat contamination resulting from the discharge of approximately 52 million gallons of contaminated liquids to the soils surrounding the tank farm during historical operations to produce materials for the U.S. nuclear weapons program.

Tank B-109 was previously emptied of pumpable liquids, leaving a very small amount of liquid waste in the tank. The water table in the area ranges 210-240 feet below Tank B-109. DOE estimates it could take more than 25 years for any contamination from Tank B-109 to reach the water table, which would then be captured and removed by the pump and treat systems.

DOE continues to assess and explore other capabilities to reduce the release of contaminants to the environment such as surface barriers placed above the ground, over the underground tank area which are designed to prevent water from precipitation from intruding into the tank.

The leak was detected by tank operations contractor Washington River Protection Solutions through a tank integrity program. This robust program includes visual inspections with remotely operated cameras inside tanks; monitoring of liquid levels inside tanks; monitoring of wells around the tanks; and a standardized leak assessment process when monitoring data indicates a possible leak from a tank. WRPS conducted a leak assessment on Tank B-109 due to readings of a small, slowly decreasing level of liquid in the tank equivalent to approximately 3.5 gallons per day.

RL-F-1321.9 (09/00)

Safely managing all Hanford tank waste is a top priority for DOE. When it comes to the overall long-term tank waste mission, the Department continues to focus on safe, efficient and effective tank waste treatment capabilities.