



Media Contacts:

Cameron Hardy, **DOE**

(509) 376-5365, Cameron.Hardy@rl.doe.gov

Dieter Bohrmann, **Ecology**

(509) 372-7954, Dieter.Bohrmann@ecy.wa.gov

Emerald Laija, **EPA**

(509) 376-4919, Laija.Emerald@epamail.epa.gov

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Agencies Agree To Integration of Soil, Facility, and Groundwater Cleanup Milestones at Hanford Site

TPA Agencies Sign On For Major Changes Governing Hanford's Central Plateau

RICHLAND, WASH. – The Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) agencies have agreed to major changes in TPA milestones which govern cleanup of the 75-square-mile area of the Central Plateau on the Hanford Site in southeastern Washington State. The Central Plateau has hundreds of contaminated facilities, buried waste and contamination deep in the soil and groundwater.

The TPA agencies, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), completed seven months of negotiations in April 2010. After a public comment period and resolution of comments, the Agencies signed the new agreement on October 26, 2010.

The importance of changes to cleanup:

- The proposed changes will, for the first time, integrate Central Plateau soil, facility, and groundwater cleanup work in the TPA.
- The agencies are adding new milestones to identify technologies for characterization, treatment and monitoring of contamination deep in the soil (called the deep vadose zone).
- The changes also align the regulatory process with a geographic approach to cleanup, by consolidating cleanup areas (a.k.a, operable units) and adding milestones to coordinate and complete cleanup of large facilities and adjacent waste sites.

The TPA agencies considered input from the public, Tribal Nations, the State of Oregon, the Hanford Advisory Board, and other stakeholders on the proposed milestone changes before they were finalized.

Eighty comments were received from 18 individuals and groups covering a wide range of topics and diverse perspectives. Based on the comments received, the following changes were made to the draft change packages:

- The Tri-Party Agreement homepage will contain a map and charts that will explain realignment of the cleanup areas, or operable units.

- EPA will write draft Records of Decision (RODs), or they will be written jointly by EPA and Ecology, if Ecology is the lead regulatory agency. The lead regulatory agency, in cooperation with DOE (and EPA if Ecology is the lead regulatory agency), will finalize the ROD.
- The RCRA-CERCLA Past Practice definition was revised.

Background

The Central Plateau is a 75-square-mile area in the center of the site that contains approximately 900 excess facilities, including five large chemical processing plants. Additionally, the Central Plateau has more than 800 waste sites, such as buried solid waste and soil contaminated with radioactive and hazardous materials. The discharge of approximately 450 billion gallons of contaminated liquids directly to soil disposal sites from the 1940s through the 1980s resulted in deep contamination in the ground and contamination of the groundwater, which is approximately 250-feet below the ground surface.

Milestones Overview

- 23 existing cleanup areas (operable units) have been consolidated into 10 areas, and 3 new cleanup areas (operable units) were created for large chemical processing plants
- 29 new milestones were created, including first-ever milestones for cleanup of contamination deep in the soil (deep vadose zone)
- 5 existing milestones were modified
- 5 existing milestones were deleted, with 4 consolidated in the new milestones and 1 redundant milestone deleted

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