

****DRAFT MINUTES****

Oregon Hanford Cleanup Board Meeting
The Dalles, Oregon
November 15 and 16, 2005

Board Members:

Present:

Paige Knight, Chair
Larry Clucas, Vice-Chair
Barry Beyeler
Mary Lou Blazek-Smith
Michael Grainey
Maxine Hines
Wayne Lei
Robert McFarlane
Max S. Power
Marc Rogelstad
Doug Woodcock
Rep. Linda Flores

Absent:

Norma Jean Germond
Armand Minthorn
Dave Van't Hof
Sen. Margaret Carter
Sen. Dave Nelson
Sen. Rick Metsger
Rep. Bob Jenson
Rep. Mary Nolan

Oregon Department of Energy:

Dirk Dunning
Deanna Henry
Lynda Horst
Susan Coburn Hughs
Ken Niles
Tom Stoops

U.S. Department of Energy:

Sharon Braswell
Mary Beth Burandt
Briant Charboneau
John Eschenberg
Billie Mauss
Erik Olds
Joe Voice

Washington Department of Ecology:

Laura Cusack
Nolan Curtis
Suzanne Dahl-Crumpler
Dib Goswami
Jane Hedges

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency:

Dennis Faulk

Fluor Hanford, Inc.:

Barbara Howard
Bruce Ford
Dick Wilde

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla

Indian Reservation:

Beverly Penny

Luncheon Speaker:

Steve Thompson, Education Director
Columbia Gorge Discovery Center

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2005

Chair Paige Knight called the meeting to order at about 1 p.m. on Tuesday. Introductions were had around the room.

Mr. Clucas mentioned that he was not listed on the minutes from the last meeting. With this correction to be made, Dr. McFarlane moved to accept the minutes; Ms. Hines seconded the motion.

Those voting in favor: Mr. Beyeler, Ms. Blazek-Smith, Mr. Clucas, Ms. Hines, Ms. Knight, Dr. McFarlane, Mr. Niles for Mr. Grainey, Mr. Rogelstad, and Mr. Woodcock. Those voting against: none. Motion carried.

There were no action items from the last meeting, and answers to questions posed to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) at the last meeting had not been provided prior to the meeting. A DOE representative, Mr. Voice, indicated that he had answers to questions Mr. Minthorn asked at the last meeting and he would send them electronically to Ms. Horst for distribution.

There was a brief discussion about news reports released in the few days preceding the meeting about cuts to Hanford's budgets and the possible ramifications. There was not enough information available to be able to answer questions. The board expressed concern about budget cuts and staff agreed to update the board when information became available.

Public Involvement

Ms. Hughs reported on attendance at an international conference on public participation. The conference presenters advocated using an extreme message as a means to get people's attention. Staff disagrees with this approach and instead works hard to be credible and honest with information. Other findings from that conference confirm what staff has found to be the case. The public, in general, is tired of public meetings and focus groups are seen as too slick and expensive to be of use. The bottom line is there are no new trends in public involvement and we are doing well with what we have. We have good communication methods, and good staff, volunteers and community members.

Ms. Hughs said there are peaks and valleys in public information and we are in a valley right now. Board members have done a great job of getting the message out, and we look forward to more of the same. In the meantime, the plan is to reconnect with stakeholders and identify new audiences, including high school and college students, as we wait for the next 'big' issue of concern, such as the Tank Closure Environmental Impact Statement.

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Groundwater Updates

DOE has been conducting groundwater restoration actions in several locations across the site. The actions being taken by DOE are being performed as interim actions meant to limit the spread of contamination while DOE collects adequate information to propose final actions.

The board received a detailed presentation on groundwater issues in the Central Plateau area of the Hanford site. The Central Plateau includes the 200 areas and the tank farms. The current priorities are to control the high-risk sources, reduce natural and artificial recharge of the groundwater and shrink the footprint of the contaminated areas.

There are 1,887 wells currently being used for monitoring in the Central Plateau. Fifteen new wells are added each year to make up for wells that go dry. There are also characterization wells installed to assess condition of the soils as well as the groundwater. Many of the new wells installed are done so with multiple uses in mind, so the most data can be collected. Some of the wells that are the deepest and located near the worst waste sites have been and are being decommissioned. There are 1,914 candidate wells for decommissioning and over 2,000 that have already been decommissioned.

DOE has a database that tracks the wells on the site. As new wells are discovered, they are added to the database. DOE and its contractors are working more closely together to assure that information about the wells is shared so that everyone working on the groundwater program is using the same data.

There are miles of water lines that were installed in the 1940s and 1950s that carry a lot of water. For example, water is taken out of the Columbia River for use in firefighting and some of the water is treated for potable water use on the site. There are seven or eight miles of lines that are in areas prone to leaks, which could move contaminants down through the vadose zone into the groundwater. These lines are being cleaned out and relined to reduce the potential for leaks. Eight reservoirs are also being relined and pumps are being fitted with automatic shutoffs.

DOE has changed how it approaches groundwater cleanup in the Central Plateau. The priority focus is on source terms and drivers, and then consideration is given to specific contaminants and how to remove them. The Central Plateau is much more complex than other areas of the site. The United States Geological Survey states that the groundwater issues in the Central Plateau are the toughest in the nation.

Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) is of the opinion that the groundwater belongs to the state, not the federal government. Cleanup is considered critical, and a complete cleanup is the baseline for the state. The cribs, ponds, ditches, and trenches created the initial 'wave' of the contamination that now exists in the groundwater, but now the tank waste is so concentrated it represents a huge concern to the state.

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The board was told that sufficient funding appears to be available for the groundwater program. An additional ten million dollars was pledged for further research into new technologies to clean up the groundwater and protect the Columbia River, including apatite sequestration at the N area and the use of calcium polysulfide in the K area.

The chair asked for public comment, and there being none, the meeting was adjourned for the day.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2005

Chair Ms. Knight called the meeting to order about 8:30 a.m. Introductions were had around the room.

The board discussed the previous day's groundwater presentation. Board members were encouraged to hear that despite budget cuts at Hanford, sufficient funds appear to have been allocated to the groundwater project. After much discussion, Dr. McFarlane moved that the board send a letter thanking DOE for their groundwater work and laying out the board's understanding of what was reported and asking DOE to comment. Ms. Hines seconded the motion.

Those voting in favor: Mr. Beyeler, Ms. Blazek-Smith, Mr. Clucas, Mr. Grainey, Ms. Hines, Ms. Knight, Dr. McFarlane, Dr. Power, Mr. Rogelstad, and Mr. Woodcock. Those voting against: None. Motion carried.

Transuranic Waste Shipment

Ms. Horst gave the board a presentation that explained the complexity of disposing of transuranic (TRU) waste, from creation to disposal. The presentation followed a TRU drum from the Rocky Flats site where the waste was generated, to the Idaho National Laboratory site where it was stored and then to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, New Mexico, where it was disposed.

The waste in this particular drum was packaged in 1973. It was shipped to the Idaho site in the mid-1970s, and stayed there until characterization began in January 2002. Characterization is the process of determining the contents of the drum to make sure it meets the waste acceptance criteria for WIPP. The drum was ultimately shipped to WIPP in September 2002.

There was discussion about the potential problems that could arise during the process of storage, characterization, shipping, and disposal of TRU waste. Staff explained that the TRU waste currently going to WIPP is contact-handled waste, which means no special shielding is required for the workers handling the waste. There is another form of TRU waste, remote-handled, which has a higher radiation field and requires special handling and shielding. There are plans to ship remote-handled waste to WIPP, but DOE does not yet have a permit from the State of New Mexico to accept remote-handled TRU waste. Shipments of TRU waste from Hanford to WIPP are currently on hold, while DOE

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focuses most of its transportation resources towards getting waste out of Idaho National Laboratory in order to meet a legal agreement. Hanford has made 100 WIPP shipments during the current calendar year and 229 since shipments began in 2000.

K-basins Sludge Removal Status Update

Mr. Dunning reported that Fluor, one of DOE's contractors, has run into major difficulties removing sludge from the K Basins. The plan had been to vacuum up the sludge and sluice it with water to move it through a flexible pipe system from the K-East basin to the K-West basin. The reality turned out to be much harder than they anticipated.

The sludge is thicker, denser, finer, and more abrasive than expected. There are metal chunks and large bits involved. The metal racks, containers, hoses, and general debris in the basins make it hard to get to the sludge.

As the schedule slipped and costs rose, the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) deadline for sludge removal was jeopardized and ultimately missed. Fluor was supposed to have a new schedule to DOE and then DOE was to have it to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at the end of September. This did not happen. EPA is now beginning discussions with DOE about the revised estimate and schedules.

Tank Waste Treatment Plant

DOE is continuing to try and resolve seismic and technical issues that have dramatically slowed construction work on the Waste Treatment Plant (WTP). DOE recently informally notified the state of Washington that the delays may cause DOE to miss its 2011 TPA milestone to have the vitrification facilities operational.

John Eschenberg, with DOE's Office of River Protection (ORP), reported that one of the things that did not work out is that engineering and construction were too closely timed – they've learned they need six months between the time a design is complete to the beginning of construction. ORP also did not have enough contingency planning built into its calculations for the project, and underestimated world economic impacts, inflation rates, traditional engineering, procurement and construction risks, and technical risks inherent in a first-of-a-kind nuclear and chemical plant of this complexity. The seismic design criteria that were initially used also should have been more directly applicable to the facility.

DOE and others have been attempting to fully determine the cost increases and schedule delays that are likely to occur. Congressional leaders have talked of a possible delay of up to four years and several billion dollars. The actual numbers are not yet publicly available.

Mr. Eschenberg described a variety of initiatives that have been implemented in an attempt to salvage the project.

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Ms. Dahl of Ecology provided some positive news about the WTP. It is forty percent complete, and the permitting process for this facility, which is very complex, is working well. Ecology has a good working relationship with ORP and contractor Bechtel in the permitting and design process.

Issues of concern to Ecology include the delay in the schedule and the cost increase. Especially disappointing was the reality that even without budget cuts, there was going to be at least a four-year delay to completing construction. The President is proposing an additional cut of \$100 million to be used for hurricane Katrina relief, which inevitably will cause further delays.

There was some discussion about the proposed budget cuts and if those cuts factored in carryover from prior years, or if the cuts were assuming the carryover was not needed.

Bulk Vitrification – Supplemental Technology

DOE and its contractors are moving forward to demonstrate whether bulk vitrification is a viable method to safely immobilize a large amount of Hanford's tank waste. Bulk vitrification involves a roll-off metal box; ceramic plates to protect the box and contain the molten glass; sand outside the ceramic as a cushion; two graphite electrodes; and sand to mix with waste to form the glass. The process works by adding sand and running current between the electrodes. As the sand melts, more sand and waste are added and melting continues. Eventually the molten waste hardens.

Ms. Billie Mauss with ORP reported that for bulk vitrification to be a success, the resulting product must be as good and as durable as the glass produced by the low activity waste (LAW) melter (in the WTP) at containing the radioactive constituents and in destroying or containing the hazardous waste constituents of the waste.

Ms. Dahl said for the state to approve any supplemental treatment technology, the treated waste must be of high quality, and the volume of secondary waste produced must be of a comparable volume, protective of human health and the environment, and comparable in cost.

Luncheon

Steve Thompson, Education Director of the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center, gave a presentation during the lunch hour about the history of the Gorge and The Dalles area.

Tank Closure Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Alternatives

ORP is in the process of writing a Tank Closure Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) covering the closure of Hanford's high-level waste tanks, piping, related cribs, trenches, sites and facilities, and impacted soil and groundwater.

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The EIS will frame alternatives and suggest DOE's preferred actions. Ecology will assess the EIS as they review the Closure and Post-Closure plans of these same tanks and facilities under Washington State laws. EPA will assess the EIS under the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA). Taken together, these reviews and assessments will result in decisions about how to clean up the central plateau, tank farms, and related facilities.

Mary Beth Burandt of ORP explained the various alternatives being considered. They include treatment alternatives ranging from no action (which is required in all EISs); moving forward with only the current WTP; expanding the WTP capability; and adding or not adding various supplemental treatment technologies. For closure, the EIS will examine variations of a landfill closure – where the tanks remain in the ground – clean closure where the tanks themselves are dug up, or selective clean closure. The EIS will also examine the impacts of leaving up to ten percent of the tank waste in the tanks.

Ecology staff assured board members that Ecology will conduct a thorough assessment of each alternative. Staff observed that alternatives that propose or select clean closure likely have little chance of being approved. All of the other options propose to cap adjoining waste sites rather than retrieve the waste. This is of concern to Oregon because of the potential long-term impacts of leaving waste in place. Reference was made to the Position Paper issued by the Board on capping waste sites.

Record of Decision on the U-Plant Canyon

Mr. Dunning reported that in early October 2005, DOE issued the final record of decision (ROD) on U Canyon. Over the past decade, DOE had considered alternatives for U Canyon that Oregon did not support. Oregon supports the alternative chosen in the ROD. It involves cleaning out the canyon, removing the roof, cutting the walls near ground level and collapsing the building in place, then covering it with a simple cap. No waste would be brought into the canyon from other facilities.

Administrative

The board discussed the next meeting, and decided on March 28 and 29, 2006.

It was decided that Ms. Horst would poll the board members to see what they wanted for the next meeting's topics and focus. There was discussion about having another tour of the Hanford site at that time, if there is enough interest. Alternatively, a tour could be arranged for the following meeting.

Mr. Lei suggested the board develop a brief 'annual report' type of letter to send to the Governor outlining the board's accomplishments for the year. It was agreed that staff would draft something to share with board members.

Chair Knight asked for public comment, and there being none, the meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m.