

## **MEDIA ADVISORY**

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### **Northwest Environmental, Public Health Groups Urge Energy Secretary to Withdraw Decision to Use Hanford as a National Radioactive Waste Dump**

*Federal Energy Department's own impact statement shows "serious human health and environmental impacts" if Hanford is used to bury 3 million cubic feet of radioactive waste*

*Comment period ends May 3rd*

Over twenty leading environmental and public health groups in the Northwest sent a letter today to the U.S. Secretary of Energy, Steven Chu, urging him to withdraw the federal Department of Energy's decisions to use Hanford, WA, as a national radioactive waste dump. The organizations, which include Columbia Riverkeeper, Heart of America Northwest, Sierra Club and the Washington and Oregon Chapters of Physicians for Social Responsibility, object to Energy's plan to truck three million cubic feet of radioactive and toxic waste to Hanford for permanent burial. Perched on the banks of the Columbia River, Hanford is already the most contaminated site in North America.

The Department of Energy's own analysis shows that the radioactive contamination in groundwater flowing to the Columbia River would be one hundred times Washington State's cancer risk cleanup standard if a landfill at Hanford is used as a national radioactive waste dump.

"For the first time the Department of Energy has clear evidence that burying more waste at Hanford will only exacerbate toxic pollution in the Columbia River," said Brett VandenHeuvel, Executive Director of Columbia Riverkeeper. "Our organizations—which collectively represent tens of thousands of Washingtonians and Oregonians—are joining the State of Oregon in demanding that the federal government listen to the people of the Northwest and focus on cleaning up this radioactive mess, not adding to the problem."

The environmental and public health groups' letter echoes a letter sent by the State of Oregon in March, which also urged the Energy Department to withdraw its decisions to use Hanford as a national radioactive waste dump.

"The Department's claim that it prioritizes the cleanup of Hanford has no credibility, so long as it also pushes to dump more waste at Hanford," said Gerry Pollet, Executive Director and attorney with the region's largest Hanford Clean-Up Watchdog group, Heart of America Northwest.

In 2000 and 2004, the Department of Energy issued decisions to use Hanford as a national radioactive waste dump. In 2000, Energy promised that the agency would consider the environmental and health impacts of its decision in a future environmental impact statement. That impact statement was issued in 2004, but Energy admitted in court documents that the impact statement was inadequate and needed to be redone. However, Energy refused to withdraw the decision to use Hanford as a national radioactive waste dump.

The groups' letter urges that the 2000 and 2004 decisions be withdrawn, since they were made without proper consideration of the environmental and health impacts. The draft Tank Closure & Waste Management Environmental Impact Statement, released in October 2009, shows the impacts to be far higher than Energy previously suggested were possible.

"Energy's new draft environmental impact statement shows that the impacts of adding more waste to the existing radioactive legacy at Hanford exceed previous estimates," said Lorri Eberle, water quality scientist for Columbia Riverkeeper. "Under Energy's plans, the agency projects that plutonium levels flowing into the Columbia River one thousand years from now will be 300 times the drinking water standard." The drinking water standard is the level at which one adult out of every ten thousand who drink the water die of cancer.

Hearings on the Department of Energy's proposal to add more radioactive and toxic pollution to Hanford drew large crowds throughout Oregon and Washington in February and March— with almost every testimony objecting to Energy's plans to dump more waste at Hanford and not cleanup leaks from the High-Level Nuclear Waste tanks.

Among the concerns of the region's environmental and public health groups are the human health risks from trucking radioactive wastes to Hanford through Portland, Spokane and other Northwest communities. The Department of Energy is accepting public comment on the Tank Closure & Waste Management Environmental Impact Statement until May 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The organizations signing the letter to Secretary Chu include: Columbia Riverkeeper; Heart of America Northwest; Sierra Club Cascade Chapter; Oregon Sierra Club; Spokane Riverkeeper; Republicans for Environmental Protection, Washington Chapter; the Northwest Environmental Defense Center; Friends of the Columbia Gorge; The Lands Council; Center for Environmental Law & Policy; Oregon Toxics Alliance; Rosemere Neighborhood Association; Hells Canyon Preservation Council; Eastern Washington Voters; Hanford Challenge; Alliance for Democracy, Portland Chapter; Hanford Watch; Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility; Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility; Olympic Environmental Council; Silver Valley Community Resource Center