



Heart of America Northwest

The Public's Voice for Hanford Cleanup

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Federal Plan to Double Nuclear Power Relies on Dumping More Highly Radioactive Waste at Hanford

Energy Department Hearings This Week Exclude Seattle, Portland and Spokane – only NW hearings to be in Tri-Cities (Monday) and Hood River (Tuesday)

Increase in trucking radioactive wastes would lead to as many as 800 fatal cancers in public along truck routes – including Portland or Spokane – according to Energy Department's own environmental impact statement

Hanford Clean-Up watchdogs urge Obama Administration to launch a national dialogue about a clean energy future that fights global warming and prioritizes clean up of existing radioactive and toxic contamination before making more

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For Release: Monday Nov. 17, 2008

The Bush Administration and federal Energy Department (USDOE) will hold two hearings in the Northwest this week on their proposed plan to double nuclear power in the nation. The Hanford Cleanup watchdog group Heart of America Northwest says that the plan, detailed in an environmental impact statement, relies on burying vast amounts of radioactive wastes in near surface landfills at Hanford and making more of the same liquid High-Level Nuclear Wastes which the Energy Department has been unable to treat and solidify at Hanford.

Hearings on the environmental impact statement for the Administration's "Global Nuclear Energy Partnership" plan (GNEP) will be held only in Pasco, WA (Monday evening) and Hood River, Oregon on Tuesday evening, despite repeated requests for hearings in Portland, Seattle and Spokane. (Hood River hearing is at the Best Western Marina hotel right off I-84 at 7 PM, with a pre-hearing citizens' workshop held by Heart of America Northwest and Columbia Riverkeeper at 6:15).

"Our nation needs a clean energy plan to fight global warming, not a scheme to create more nuclear waste to be buried at Hanford and threaten the Columbia River," said Gerry Pollet, Director of the region's leading Hanford Clean-Up watchdog group, Heart of America Northwest. "It's not clean energy if it contaminates our water and kills hundreds when the waste is trucked around the nation."

The plan to double nuclear power in the US relies on "reprocessing" the highly radioactive fuel rods removed from commercial reactors to chemically extract some of the Plutonium and Uranium from them for reuse in new types of reactors, which have yet to be demonstrated. The Energy Department and industry have renamed this "recycling" and "closing the fuel cycle." However, this is the same basic process which created the 53 million gallons of deadly liquid High-Level Nuclear Waste sitting in tanks at Hanford, for which there is no treatment plant. Over a million gallons of those wastes have

leaked from older Single-Shell Tanks and the contamination is spreading more rapidly towards the Columbia River than the Energy Department had claimed was possible.

Under GNEP, instead of the fuel rods being sent to a deep underground geologic repository, such as the stalled effort at Yucca Mt., Nevada, the fuel rods would be melted in acids to have Plutonium and Uranium extracted – leaving highly radioactive chemical hazardous liquid wastes. These wastes would then be buried in shallow landfills after being turned to solids.

USDOE admits that trucking these highly radioactive wastes will cause as many as 816 fatal cancers in the public exposed to the radiation from the trucks along the routes for reprocessing and burial – even if there are no accidents or terrorist attacks (EIS Table S.4-10, page S-52).

The Energy Department has stated in other decision documents that it has already chosen Hanford to be its national disposal site for mixed radioactive and hazardous chemical wastes; and, one of two national burial grounds for radioactive wastes that it refers to as “low-level” even though they may be as radioactive as, or more radioactive than, High-Level Nuclear Waste.

“The Bush Administration and USDOE are improperly trying to hide the impacts to Hanford, the Columbia River and the Northwest, from their scheme for reprocessing nuclear waste,” says environmental attorney and Heart of America Northwest Director Gerry Pollet. The law requiring an environmental impact statement (the National Environmental Policy Act, NEPA) also requires that other decisions to dispose of USDOE’s wastes have to be disclosed along with the impacts of those related decisions. The USDOE’s GNEP impact statement says it only analyzes generic locations – even though USDOE has separately issued a decision to bury such wastes at Hanford. “This is an effort to ‘piecemeal’ the consideration of the environmental impacts in order to avoid public comment.”

USDOE also proposes to use Hanford’s unlined and leaking commercial “Low-Level Radioactive Waste” landfill for waste from reprocessing facilities around the nation, if commercial disposal is used. Currently, that landfill – operated under lease from the State of Washington – is limited to waste from the Northwest and Rocky Mountain States. The EIS discusses asking Congress to remove that restriction and changing the license for the site. The other two commercial radioactive waste disposal sites are either closing or can not accept the more radioactive wastes that would be generated from reprocessing.

Heart of America Northwest is calling on the in-coming Obama Administration to halt the nuclear reprocessing program and have a national dialogue on a clean energy program to fight global warming, along with a firm commitment to fund the cleanup of nuclear waste and not use Hanford as a national radioactive chemical waste dump.

Columbia Riverkeeper and Heart of America Northwest are offering a biodiesel bus from Portland to the Hood River hearing on Tuesday evening:

Travel to GNEP Hearing in Hood River on our Biodiesel Bus – We’ll give you an issue update and Feed You on the Way

When: Meet at 5:00 pm/Bus will leave at 5:15 pm/Arrive in Hood River around 6:30 pm/Depart Hood River at 9 pm/Arrive in Portland around 10:00 pm

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