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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Environmental Watchdog Sounds Alarm Over Energy Dept. Plan for Aging Structures at Hanford Nuclear Site

June 22, 2020 (Richland, WA)—The U.S. Dept. of Energy’s (Energy) latest plan for aging radioactive structures at the Hanford Nuclear Site fails to protect public health and the Columbia River in the long-run, according to environmental group Columbia Riverkeeper. [June 29th marks the close of a 90-day comment period](#) on Energy’s proposal to stabilize three at-risk structures at Hanford that contain enough plutonium to power multiple nuclear bombs. Energy’s plan: fill the structures with engineered grout, a concrete-like substance, to mitigate the risk of potential future failure.

“Energy’s plan abandons dangerous radioactive pollution at Hanford. Stabilizing waste is an important first step, not the end game,” said Dan Serres, conservation director for Columbia Riverkeeper. “To protect people’s health and the Columbia for generations to come, Energy must develop a long-term solution for aging structures at Hanford.”

Three years ago Hanford made international headlines when PUREX Tunnel 1 suddenly collapsed, sending a plume of radioactive dust into the air. This event prompted a study into the integrity of other structures located in Hanford’s former plutonium production area, the Central Plateau. According to the investigation, 27 structures in the Central Plateau need mitigation work. Further analysis of 11 of those 27 structures identified three underground liquid waste disposal structures with the highest risk for collapse and in need of immediate stabilization to avoid a sudden failure.

When plutonium production ended at Hanford in 1989, over 500 contaminated facilities and structures remained. Some structures received liquid waste during Hanford’s plutonium production operations and contain residual radioactive and chemical contamination. According to the federal government, several of these structures pose a high risk of collapse, which could release radiation into the environment.

“The mighty Columbia River is the lifeblood of our region,” said Serres. “We must finish the job to clean up Hanford nuclear waste. People across the Northwest will not stand for the U.S. government cutting corners.”

Resources:

- [Fact Sheet for more information on the comment period](#)
- [Riverkeeper's Comment Guide](#)

About Columbia Riverkeeper

Columbia Riverkeeper's mission is to protect and restore the water quality of the Columbia River and all life connected to it, from the headwaters to the Pacific Ocean. Columbia Riverkeeper works with people in dozens of communities—rural and urban—with the same goals: protecting the health of their families and the places they love. Columbia Riverkeeper enforces environmental laws to stop illegal pollution, protects salmon habitat, and challenges harmful fossil fuel terminals. Columbia Riverkeeper is a member of Waterkeeper Alliance, the world's fastest growing environmental movement, uniting more than 300 Waterkeeper organizations around the world.

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