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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pacific Northwest Residents Agree: Hanford's Toxic Groundwater and Aging Infrastructure Need Comprehensive, Long Term Solutions

July 9, 2020 (Richland, WA)—The U.S. Dept. of Energy's (Energy) latest plan for addressing toxic groundwater and aging radioactive structures at the Hanford Nuclear Site fails to protect long term public health and the Columbia River, according to environmental group Columbia Riverkeeper. [June 29 marked the end 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. [July 8 marked the end of a 60-day comment period](#) urging Energy to address several groundwater plumes containing high concentrations of both radioactive and toxic chemicals—far exceeding drinking water standards. Hanford's groundwater plumes are migrating towards the Columbia river, posing a serious and invisible threat to the river, people, and salmon.

On Aging Infrastructure

“Energy’s plan could abandon 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.”

With the recommendation to fill three more structures with grout, grouting in place is becoming the norm for Hanford cleanup. Oregon Dept. of Energy’s comments on this proposed plan state:

We are concerned that documentation provided by the U.S. Department of Energy to support this proposed action fails to consider reasonable alternatives beyond grouting, and does not fully consider what implications these interim, non-final actions might have to final remediation cost; the condition of the contaminants within the stabilized structure; and precedents set for underground waste storage tanks at Hanford. While interim stabilization with engineered grout seems an optimal way to reduce the risk to human health and the environment, a site-by-site evaluation of how this action will affect the total estimated cost of eventual site closure is needed.

“We share the State of Oregon’s concerns and agree that grouting the Z-361 tank appears premature at this time, without further information to address the concerns raised by Oregon and others,” said Serres. “The mighty Columbia River is the lifeblood of the Pacific Northwest. 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.”

Hanford’s Invisible Threat: Toxic Groundwater

Throughout the Hanford Nuclear Site, contaminated and radioactive groundwater seeps closer and closer to the Columbia River. Energy’s plan to pump and treat is a good one, but falls short in addressing all toxic chemicals present because some are more difficult than others to remove from the groundwater.

The extremely high concentrations of toxic and radioactive contamination present in Hanford’s groundwater is a direct result of the unconscionable practices that occurred throughout the plutonium production phase at Hanford. These practices included the government:

- Discharging contaminated liquid waste directly into the soil in 200 Areas;
- Discharging contaminated liquid waste into open ditches and ponds;
- Allowing the discharge of radiologically and chemically contaminated process waste into unlined cribs and trenches; and
- Allowing liquid waste to infiltrate directly into the soil.

Without active cleanup of all contaminants, and without a continued source of pollution, the time required for the existing groundwater contamination concentrations to reach drinking water standards is 65 years for uranium in the B Complex plume area and 800 years for technetium, among the several other pervasive contaminants present.

“It is irresponsible of the Trump administration to pick and choose which contaminants to treat, while leaving others in the ground to poison the groundwater and risk the health of river ecosystems, salmon, and the people that rely on clean water and salmon to survive,” said Serres. “We will continue to hold the Trump administration accountable for Hanford’s nuclear legacy.”

Resources:

- [Fact Sheet for Aging Infrastructure Comment Period](#)

- [Fact Sheet for Toxic Groundwater Comment Period](#)
- [Oregon Department of Energy's Comments on Aging Infrastructure](#)
- [Webinar with Oregon Department of Energy on Toxic Groundwater](#)
- [Riverkeeper's Comment Guide](#)
- [Read our PUREX Tunnel Fact Sheet for more information on the risks with grouting in place](#)
- [Read Energy's Report and Recommendation on Aging Infrastructure](#)
- [Aging Infrastructure at Hanford Threatens the Columbia River, blog post](#)

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.