



Together. For the River.

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Submitted via email to: NEPA_SA@rl.gov

**Re: Spokane Community Members Public Comments and Questions on the Draft
Supplement Analysis for the West Area Tank Treatment Mission to Comply with the National
Environmental Policy Act.**

Dear U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and Washington Department of Ecology,

The city of Spokane has been vocal in their opposition to the shipment of liquid nuclear waste from Hanford through their community. Mayor Lisa Brown wrote in a letter dated September 18, 2024, “I am writing to express my strong opposition of the planned shipment of liquid radioactive hazardous waste from the Hanford site to facilities in Texas and Utah **through Spokane or by any other route.**” (emphasis added).

To our knowledge Energy has failed to engage the city of Spokane about the results of the Holistic Negotiation, proposals for transporting tank waste offsite, or the Draft Supplement Analysis for the West Area Tank Treatment Mission (hereinafter Draft SA). The Draft SA fails to analyze potential transportation routes and the environmental impacts therefrom, this is a violation of NEPA’s requirement for cumulative impacts analysis and environmental justice impacts. Mayor Brown illustrates,

This plan poses an unacceptable risk to our city, as both rail and truck traffic passes through the heart of downtown Spokane over high bridges and elevated viaducts. We cannot afford the risk associated with a train derailment or truck accident. Furthermore, the communities closest to the interstate and rail corridors in our city are ones that have already borne the weight of historic discrimination and disinvestment. The potential negative consequences of this plan would disproportionately impact some of our most marginalized communities.

Energy’s failure to engage with Spokane leaves the city in the dark when it comes to plans that directly impact their community and environment.

In an effort to fill this gap, Columbia Riverkeeper and Hanford Challenge hosted a Spokane Hanford Community Forum on April 10, 2025 where we invited the community of Spokane to join us and ask their questions and share their thoughts when it comes to Energy’s proposal and Hanford. We recorded these remarks and have transcribed the questions and comments below.

Please view each comment as an individual comment and respond to all questions individually.

Riverkeeper has added in any context needed to understand the question being asked.

Question: Maybe you said it, but where are they [Energy] taking the waste [tank waste] to?

Question: Are there grazing rights allowed on that land [Hanford Nuclear Site] or adjacent to it, like cattle or horses, or anything?

Question: What has the process looked like to evaluate the pros and cons of rail versus, you know, truck or like liquid solid. What has that whole process looked like?

Question: I worked for Boyle's Brothers Drilling Company back in the 70s. We did exploratory core drilling, which means we went down over a mile deep with, anyway, drilling. They wanted to bury the radioactive stuff back in, remember they were, well, you guys are all too young, but back in the 70s, they finally chose Nevada to bury a bunch of the radioactive stuff, okay? But that's what we're doing, exploratory core drilling.

Layers and layers of basalt, lava, okay? So my question is, okay, we're graveyard shift. We were pulling the rods out of the hole. Okay, 40-foot sections, okay? So we were, I would be up in the crow's nest for over, you know, a whole shift, because it takes a long time to pull 5,280 feet.

We went over a mile deep, okay. So my question is, every night, you know, I'd watch the sun come up, but I could see they're burning off. I don't know if you folks have ever been to Texas, where they burn off the natural gas and stuff.

What were they burning off, and are they still burning it off? And the reason I ask, I lived in Othello, which is, you know, for over four years, which is close, which is right. The downwinders, anybody in here know about the downwinders? Okay, good. Those are people, the farmers and people that got cancer, leukemia, on and on. A lot of these people have died. People a lot younger than me died from all of this radioactive stuff. Mostly the farmers, because it was in the fields. All this stuff was blowing.

Comment: So, I guess one bit of good news. When I started covering Hanford in 1986, just by natural decay half the radioactivity in the strontium and cesium is already evaporated. Just by the art of time, because that is a 30-year half-life. So obviously, when you look at. I mean, part of the problem with a discussion like this tonight. And Dan touched on this. You've got so many moving parts of the story. It's hard to get your head around. And each one is different.

I mean, the situation with short-lived radioactive strontium and cesium. Is really compelling in the short run. Especially if you've got workers nearby. The longer-term issues with plutonium 239. You know, we've got a 24,000-year half-life. Then you're looking at eternity. And how to protect future generations from that material. Assuming that a lot of it is still going to be still remaining on the site. You know, I guess it would help me. As somebody who's largely moved on to other things. I'm actually doing an investigation of PFAS on the West Plains now. Is to get an idea of how the groups in the region see the strategy from a public interest standpoint of what's important now. What is going to be? You know, in 30 years. The problem, just again by attrition of radioactive decay. Is going to look different. To really try to put your heads together. To get a consensus of how citizens can better assist your fine work. And the fine work of the people that are working on the problem. To make sure that it's funded. And to make sure, especially that the rights of Native Americans on the site. Are fulfilled in eternity. So, I could talk all night. But I'm going to shut up right there.

Question: What is the safest way to get it [tank waste] transported? I've been coming to these meetings for years. And there's always some kind of new thing, but it's still the same stuff. And then I also wonder, where are the tribal lands [ceded lands and what does that mean at Hanford]?

Question: [About] Institutional controls and what you're thinking is on that, in terms of, I mean this would be, I mean, Hanford is being institutionally controlled now and it has been since 1945. Sometimes more than we'd like. But for the long term because a lot of the material there is

radioactive and we've seen that with strontium and cesium. We won't see it with plutonium. But is there any consensus in the environmental groups? Among what is an appropriate period. To rely upon institutional controls to protect the environment and public safety? [Please answer this question as if addressed to Energy not environmental groups]

Question: Hello, my name is Kelsey and this only became a part of my attention recently because I had a hair mineral analysis test that just shows you like, "oh, do you have magnesium and potassium? What are your levels?" And then the toxic materials. Uranium was off the charts and I was like, "That's not supposed to be good." So my doctor was saying like, you should look into this because of the area that we live in and I kind of felt a little freaked out that "Yeah, this isn't talked about at all," in my realm at least. And wondering what people can do individually. Like she was like, go get a pure water purifying filter that's bigger than a Brita filter and stuff. But it just feels like. I don't know. There's a little bit of a trust issue of, isn't my water supposed to be filtered? I'm not using well water. But yeah, do you guys have any recommendations for individuals to protect themselves? And then I don't know. I just. It was kind of interesting to see. Things pop up in the results. And like how it is based on history. But also a little terrifying. So, thanks. [Please address any downstream testing or monitoring of water and air that Energy does for Hanford contamination offsite.]

Question: What's the logic behind going to the grout as opposed to the vitrification of the glass? I'm not really sure what the reasoning is behind that, yeah, what is it?

Question: What other government contractors are there? Besides Energy Northwest. I assume it's more and does the DOE oversee the whole thing? Or is it like a checkerboard? So the DOE Gets this section and the private government contractors. Get this section. Do you guys know?

Question: How the deregulation at the federal level is impacting the environmental impact assessments of sites like this and remediation?

Question: I did my graduate research under a graduate researcher at the Savannah River Ecology Lab. And I was kind of curious. How the sites compare. Is there an institutional, like an educational institutional component? That's associated with Hanford. In the same way, the Savannah River Ecology Lab has had a lot of openness. In collaboration with DOE. On being allowed to do research. On the environmental impacts of the Savannah River site. As a grad student working on the Savannah River site. I was not educated very extensively on the risks to living in New Ellenton and Jackson, South Carolina. When I took the job. I thought I was moving to Savannah, Georgia. That was not the case. So I guess you know. Is there also the East Coast is much more dense? Is there a density component? And probably an environmental justice component that has allowed the Hanford site to continue in its state, versus the Savannah River site, that has cleaned up more. Or is it ease of mitigating those wastes and grout versus the vitrification issue here? I mean, they're very different sites, different sizes. But I'm just curious how they compare. If you care to share. Are there lessons we can take from them?

Question: The offline is that there's an enormous budget pressure now to put pressure on regulations to weaken them and lower the standards for clean up. And clean up technology. How much sleep are you losing over that? Since the present regime seems to be doing a lot by Executive orders. Covering stuff that we never ever considered. Would be covered in executive orders. States of emergency that are just made up. And you've got a very aggressive justice department now that's really into intimidating regulators, people, other people within the justice department. How do you see that playing out at Hanford? I mean, what is? I guess my worst

fear is that there's something like a national emergency declared. We're not going to do NEPA anymore. We're just going to do things. Am I too worked up about that? Or how do you? How do you see that unfolding?

So, there were layoffs at Hanford. Immediately. And these are DOE people. These are not contractor people. And I guess the question I have is, how is that playing out? I mean, if you decapitate the DOE field staff at Hanford, that understandably causes a lot of problems for the people that actually do the work and the contractors. How is that playing out? And does that give you? I mean. Senator Murray has spoken up about it, but I'd like to hear your perspective on it as well.

Question: Interviewer 9: And we're stuck here in a county that's only about 500,000. And there's everybody on the west side that doesn't think about us much. Have you had much luck meeting with the city council? Or county commissioners? [Please address whether or not Energy has had any conversations with Spokane's city council, mayor, or county commissioners.]

Comment: I am a conservation organizer in Spokane as well. And I will say that our city council members are incredibly receptive to feedback about conservation issues. I've had conversations with them about properties in Spokane that have resulted in council action. And that was just like a friendly conversation. They really are interested in hearing about this. And Hanford is a conversation that is being had at the upper levels of the administration. And I think for them to put time to these issues. They have to be hearing from the community. That it's an issue for them as well. And so, by going to the city council and speaking at open forum, even if there's not an agenda item. That is your opportunity or sending an email to Paul Dillon, Zack Zappone, Kitty Klitzke. Any one of them is going to take that. And really have a conversation with you about it. So I'd encourage you to reach out to them because they are receptive.

Question: Back here. I heard you say tritium and plutonium, but it's actually tritium that they want to move. Isn't that, is that correct? [Please answer if Tritium is part of the tank waste at play here.]

Thank you for considering these questions and comments from a small subset of the Spokane community, as you can see there is a lot of interest in learning more about Hanford and what is happening onsite and transportation issues that stem from those actions.

Sincerely,

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