

## Section

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THURSDAY, DEC. 19, 2002

TRI-CITY HERALD

(4 OVER)

## Briefs

### **Hanford fuel deadline nearly reached**

Hanford's K Basins project appears likely to miss an interim deadline by one week.

The Tri-Party Agreement, the legal pact governing Hanford's cleanup, calls for 1,053 tons of spent nuclear fuel to be moved from the K West Basin to a central Hanford underground vault by Dec. 31. The waste will be in 188 specialized cylindrical canisters. By Tuesday, two weeks before the deadline, Fluor Hanford had moved 167 canisters, leaving 21 to go, said Fluor spokeswoman Michele Gerber. Fluor expects to move the last one by Jan. 8.

The K Basins are two indoor, water-filled and leak-prone pools that originally held 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel 400 yards from the Columbia River. Fluor and the Department of Energy have a legal deadline of July 31, 2004, to move all the fuel.

# CH2M Hill testing sprinkler device in waste tank

■ *Experiment gradually turns radioactive salt cake into liquid for disposal*

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

It looks like an upside-down lawn sprinkler.

But it's Hanford's first real-life experiment with removing solid radioactive gunk from inside one of its huge underground waste tanks.

Two weeks ago, CH2M Hill Hanford Group turned on the sprinkler hanging

inside Tank U-107, allowing it to spray and gradually turn radioactive salt cake in the tank into waste-laced water to be pumped out.

By February, CH2M Hill and the Department of Energy's Office of River Protection hope to dissolve and pump out 100,000 gallons of the 320,000 gallons of solids inside Tank U-107.

Then they'll spend a couple of months analyzing whether the technique works effectively, said Jim Thompson, the Office of River Protection's single-shell tanks project manager, and Terry Sams, CH2M Hill's retrieval and closure projects strategic planner.

If the technique appears successful, CH2M Hill and DOE will discuss the study results with Washington's Department of Ecology to see if the state approves of the technique.

This sprinkler system is one of three techniques Hanford is considering to remove solid wastes from its 177 underground tanks — which include 149 older, leak-prone single-shell tanks.

The tanks hold 53 million gallons of wastes. More than 22 millions are liquid, with most in 28 newer double-shell tanks awaiting eventual glassification. But 31 million gallons of solid wastes are in all 177 tanks.

DOE recently set a goal to remove all liquid and solid wastes from 26 to 40 tanks by the end of 2006, then close those tanks. First, however, officials need to decide the best way to do that.

The first technique to be tested is the sprinkler system in Tank U-107.

The second technique will be to insert hoses and pumps into tanks S-102 and S-112 to more forcefully break up and dissolve solid wastes so they can be pumped out. This will be attempted in late 2003.

The third technique will use a tank crawler — a miniature bulldozer teamed up with a huge vacuum cleanerlike device

— that is expected to be tested in Tank C-104, possibly in 2004.

CH2M Hill and DOE will study the capabilities and limitations of each technique. The idea is to match the proper techniques with the types of wastes inside each tank, Sams and Thompson said.

Sams and Thompson believe the pace of cleaning out the 26 to 40 tanks will speed up after the tests because the equipment can be duplicated so several tanks can be pumped out simultaneously.

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# Battelle gets PNNL 60 more days

■ *DOE working out details before granting new contract*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy has given Battelle an additional contract extension of 60 days to operate Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland.

Battelle was to begin a new five-year contract in October with streamlined requirements for the lab, but its old contract has twice been extended while details are worked out.

"It's a unique and novel contract," said Paul Kruger, associate manager for science and technology for DOE in Richland. "It's using new and different techniques we want to have nailed down."

Although the latest extension will be effective through February, DOE headquarters is close to working out the last few points at issue in the contract, and it could be ready in the next couple of weeks, Kruger said.

"It would put the lab on a more commercial footing and move it away from elements of DOE administration that are perhaps not reflective of the commercial business environment," Kruger said.

Lab officials are confident PNNL is in a good position to meet those requirements.

It's already been awarded three important commercial safety certifications sometimes called "the triple crown."

Most recently it received the ISO 14001 safety certification for operating environmental management systems from the International Organization for Standardization. It's the model used for implementing environmental management systems in 37,000 organizations around the world.

In 1998, PNNL became the first national lab to gain validation of Integrated Safety Management and in 2001

became the first DOE Office of Science lab to reach gold star status in the Voluntary Protection Program.

Under the new contract, oversight will change but should be stronger, Kruger said.

"The new contract will basically align us more with external regulations and best practices," said lab Director Lura Powell. "I think it will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness."

DOE also is interested in spreading the concept to other labs.

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## Hanford site selected 60 years ago today



Herald file photos

Sixty years ago today, Lt. Col. Franklin Matthias saw a similar view of the White Bluffs area as he flew over the present Hanford site scouting for the location of a top-secret World War II project. Matthias knew immediately he'd found the perfect spot to build a plutonium production plant.

# Observing 60

## Fateful flight found site for secret war project

By Chris Sivula  
Herald staff writer

Sixty years ago today, a small military observation plane flew over the Horse Heaven Hills and along the Columbia River. It was an unusually warm day with a chinook wind blowing under sunny skies.

Lt. Col. Franklin Matthias glanced through the Plexiglas floor in the cockpit, and knew at once he had found the site for the largest construction project of World War II. Hanford.

It was a decision that would change the Mid-Columbia in ways few could imagine. And the change would come almost overnight.

Several events could be considered Hanford's beginning: Glenn T. Seaborg's successful efforts to create plutonium 239 in 1941, the first controlled nuclear chain reaction in December 1942, or acquisition of the first tract of land in March 1943.

### Hanford history

See story and more photos, **A6-7.**



In a 1992 interview at his California home, Matthias recalls his experiences founding Hanford during World War II. He died in December 1993.

But Matthias' flight was the first link between the Mid-Columbia and events unfolding in nuclear physics laboratories. It was a whirlwind marriage.

The day Matthias' little plane flew along the river, the farming towns of Hanford, Richland and White Bluffs had a combined population of about 1,200. Months later, the federal government evicted everyone, telling them only that their land was needed for the war effort.

During the next two years, 157,000 people came and went as construction workers assembled a remarkable weapons plant, sometimes working

from plans drafted only hours earlier.

The peak population in Hanford's tent and trailer city at any single time during construction of the Hanford project reached 51,000.

Until the bomb dubbed Fat Man was dropped on Nagasaki in August 1945, all but a handful of people remained ignorant of the purpose behind the Hanford effort.

In reality, even the best informed insiders were uncertain where this marriage between the isolated Washington desert and cutting-edge physics might lead. Certainly, no one anticipated what the next 60 years would bring to the project and the Tri-City community.

"When the Corps of Engineers started its work, its job was simply to build and operate the production plants," Gen. Leslie Groves, head of the Manhattan Project, wrote in his memoirs.

"The problems involved in the development of the bomb and its delivery were for the time being largely ignored. Nor was the full magnitude of the project generally appreciated.

"No one thought of it as entailing expenditures running into billions of dollars. Not until later would it be recognized that chances would have to be taken that in more normal times would be considered reckless in the extreme.

24 DEC. 02

# \$108 million Hanford fire suit filed

■ *More than 100 parties seeking damages from government*

**By Mike Lee**  
Herald staff writer

More than 100 parties filed a lawsuit Monday against the federal government, seeking \$108 million for damages resulting from the Hanford fire of 2000.

The suit also charges that the fire is responsible for two deaths — the first time such allegations have surfaced publicly.

Robert Pierce, a Hanford worker who was trapped in his Benton City home when it was surrounded by fire, suffered severe burns and died of heart failure in January 2002.

Abigail Kimberly Grace Bevan-Church, born shortly after her mother survived the fire, died within hours from complications that lawyers will try to prove were caused by fire-related stress.

“It gives us — I mean all of us — the opportunity to perhaps prove that people should be more valuable than sagebrush in

government policy,” said Irene Peck-Neasham, 64, of Benton City, whose home was destroyed by the blaze.

Jerry Rose, a Benton City survivor whose home was spared, said the suit isn’t about money — at least not for him.

“No, not at all,” Rose said. “This is about changing policy. The only way they recognize something is wrong is when a big lawsuit hits them in the face.”

He has neighbors, however, who lost everything and had no insurance. “(They) need to have some financial gain out of this,” he said.

The straightforward language of the suit filed Monday belies what promises to be an emotional and intriguing jury trial as residents try to hold the government responsible for alleged shoddy land management and misguided fire suppression efforts.

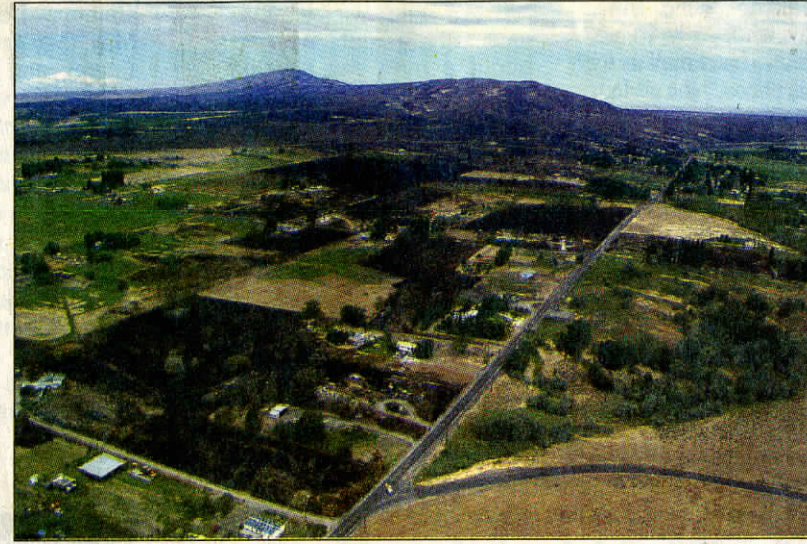
“The federal government is not exempt

from the same obligations as any other landowner in Benton County,” said Max Benitz Jr., a Benton County commissioner and Prosser-area rancher. “The federal government should be held accountable for its lack of action.”

The lawsuit is a culmination of about two years of work by a team of lawyers from Seattle, Spokane and Kennewick. They represent Benton City residents who were burned out by the 163,000-acre blaze, insurance companies that made payments for fire damage, Benton County and others.

“As a direct result of (federal agencies) having negligently failed to establish and maintain firebreaks, and negligently allowed an abundance of fuel and vegetation creating a known fire hazard to accumulate ... a fire occurred on and over the neglected firebreak area,” said the complaint, filed in federal District Court in Richland.

See **Suit**, Page A2



Herald file photo  
This aerial photograph shows the devastation to Benton City caused by the Hanford wildfire of 2000. Rattlesnake Mountain is in the background. Residents and other parties are suing the Department of Energy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for \$108 million in damages from the blaze.

# Mid-Columbia

## Fluor to miss fuel removal deadline

■ *Company expects to finish moving Hanford fuel by Jan. 7*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford will miss today's legal deadline to remove all of the K West Basin's spent nuclear fuel by about one week.

By today, Fluor was supposed to move 1,053 tons of spent fuel from the K Basins to a huge underground vault in central Hanford for the Department of Energy. The company expects to have moved almost 911 tons by today, said Fluor spokesman Michael Turner.

Fluor expects to finish moving the entire 1,053 tons by Jan. 7, Turner said.

The K Basins are two indoor, water-filled, leak-prone pools that originally held 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel 400 yards from the Columbia River.

The Tri-Party Agreement, the legal pact governing Hanford's cleanup, calls for all 2,300 tons to be moved to the central Hanford vault by mid-2004. This project is considered Hanford's second highest priority behind glassifying wastes in the site's underground tanks.

Today is an interim Tri-Party Agreement deadline to remove all the fuel that originally was in the K West Basin.

Meanwhile, Fluor has begun moving the K East fuel to the K West Basin, because the K West Basin already has the equipment to

process the fuel underwater and load it into specialized cylindrical transportation-and-storage containers called "multi-canister overpacks" or "MCOs."

The exact number of MCOs needed to move 1,053 tons of fuel is unclear. But previous Fluor estimates put that figure between 184 and 188. Meanwhile, Fluor expects to moved its 179th MCO today.

Overall, it is expected to take about 400 MCOs to move all 2,300 tons of fuel.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is the lead regulator on the K Basins project. Appropriate EPA and DOE officials were not available Monday.

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31 DEC 02

## **4. FFTF battles heat up**

Hanford's embattled research reactor seemed to have as many lives as a litter of kittens in 2002.

The year started with the Department of Energy announcing it was starting the permanent shutdown of Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility. Both Republican and Democratic administrations had concluded the government had no need for it and ordered it permanently shut down.

But just before the first sodium was to be drained from the system — a step that would make restart difficult — Benton County filed suit in federal court. DOE agreed to a two-week delay, which was soon extended to mid-March 2003.

Whether that delay will allow FFTF supporters the time they need to find a way to restart the reactor remains to be seen.

FFTF supporters are trying to find a private operator, which is proving difficult without DOE's support. And they have issues of liability, licensing and waste disposal to overcome.

24 DEC 07

# Director of PNNL bids adieu

■ *Lura Powell reflects on job as end-of-month retirement approaches*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

Lura Powell would not have taken the job as director of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory if she had realized how much and how difficult the travel demands would be, she said.

"But I would have missed out on a lot," she said as she prepared recently to pack up her office. "I feel very good about the things that have happened since I have been here."



**Powell**

Powell retires from the Department of Energy's national lab in Richland at the end of the month. But she won't be leaving the Tri-Cities.

One of the things she would have missed was moving from the well-established government corridor on the East Coast to experience life in a relatively young and growing area like the Tri-Cities.

"I got so engaged in the community as director," she said. "I was engaged in the planning effort. I've gotten very passionate about building a diversified economy."

A particular interest is developing a four-year university with graduate studies in the Tri-Cities.

She and her husband, Art King,

See **Director**, Page A2



## Briefs

### **\$1,500 reward offered for Hanford poacher**

The reward for the person who poached a bull elk on the Hanford Reach National Monument has grown to \$1,500.

The Hunters Heritage Council contribution will be added to the \$500 federal reward offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person who poached the elk.

The Hunters Heritage Council is a consortium of the Washington State Bowhunters, Inland Northwest Wildlife Council, Washingtonians for Wildlife Conservation, Citizens for Washington's Wildlife and Safari International chapters of Puget Sound, Northwest, Inland Empire and Central Washington.

The mature bull elk was found dead in early September on monument property near the Tri-Cities. The bull had been shot several times and only the antlers were removed, leaving the rest of the animal to rot.

Several other poached elk and deer have been found in the same area, both on and off the monument, with only their antlers removed. Officials believe the incidents are related.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service does have a person of interest, said Steve Magone, a special agent for the agency in Spokane.

Anyone with information regarding the incident should call Fish and Wildlife Service refuge officer Mike Ritter at 371-1801, officer Mitch Messenger at 509-261-0142 or Magone at 509-928-6050.

# Snapshots of 2002

3100002  
■ *Herald* reporters, editors select top 10 Mid-Columbia stories

By the Herald staff

While the state and much of the nation struggled economically through 2002, the Mid-Columbia didn't lack good news.

Work was good here. Jobs boomed. The economy hummed along while water deals promised to propel growth for decades.

That's not to say there weren't

## Looking back

► 2002 an unnerving year. **A6.**

► Roll call of those who died. **A7.**

some major setbacks in almost every area touched by state economic problems, not to mention West Coast port closures, inflated energy bills and struggles

at the Umatilla Chemical Depot.

And 2003 promises to start on a sober note, with possible war in the Middle East, an uncertain national economy and a state budget process that likely will be far more painful than last session's.

But 2002 is worth a look back at what the Herald's reporters and editors chose as the top stories of the year.

## 1. Work begins on vit plant

At least 10 years in the making, Hanford finally began construction of the long-awaited waste vitrification plant in August.

Known as the "vit plant," the project is supposed to tackle Hanford's worst environmental problem — 53 million gallons of highly radioactive wastes in 177 underground tanks.

The plant will turn those liquid wastes into cylinders of glass, which will hold the radioactive substances within them for at least 10,000 years.

The project stalled three times in the past, leaving the Department of Energy to regroup while plans still were on the drawing board.



Herald/Bob Brawdy

A construction worker climbs a vertical face of steel reinforcing bar at the low-activity waste facility at the waste vitrification plant under construction at Hanford. The plant is designed to tackle Hanford's worst environmental problem — 53 million gallons of highly radioactive wastes.

7 JAN 02

# Fluor lays off employees

■ *260 employees being laid off or have volunteered to leave Fluor Hanford*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford told numerous employees Monday that they will be laid off.

Overall, 260 employees are either being laid off or have volunteered to leave the company in this latest round of work force juggling, according to a memo sent to

Fluor's workers by Dave Van Leuven, the company's executive vice president. The majority are involuntary layoffs.

Fluor has not determined yet whether the upcoming job reductions will exceed 260, Fluor spokeswoman Judy Connell said Monday. Late last year, Fluor speculated up to 400 workers could be removed. Fluor Hanford's corporate team employs about 4,300 people.

This reduction is part of Fluor shifting more workers away from administrative tasks toward on-the-ground cleanup efforts to comply with the Department of Energy's moves to accelerate Hanford's overall cleanup. The majority of laid-off

people had been expected to be in Fluor's administrative departments.

"Again, these reductions are not pleasant but necessary. We must have a right-sized, properly skilled work force to focus on work that accelerates cleaning up the site, and reduce, or eliminate activities and services that do not directly contribute to cleanup," Van Leuven wrote.

Fluor plans to open a center Wednesday at 1810-1812 Terminal Drive in Richland to help the terminated workers find new jobs, Van Leuven's memo said.

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## Briefs

### **PNNL names interim laboratory director**

Walt Apley has been appointed interim laboratory director for Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

He will temporarily fill the position vacated by Lura Powell, who resigned as director this summer and whose last day was Dec. 31.

A director is expected to be named this month, but the transition time likely will take several months. Apley will lead the lab during that time.

Apley has been at the Richland lab for 25 years and manages the largest research organization there, the Environmental Technology Directorate.

Rod Quinn, director of the Process Science and Engineering Division under Apley, will serve as associate laboratory director for the Environmental Technology Directorate during Apley's interim assignment.

# Officials study dirt from Hanford burn site

9 JAN 03

Bechtel Hanford is studying samples of dirt and debris from a south Hanford waste burial site that spontaneously produced a 2-foot-tall flame for a couple seconds.

On Dec. 20, workers were piling excavated dirt and debris at the 618-5 site just north of the 300 Area, and a few hundred feet from the Columbia River. They spotted a yellow-orange flame spurting from the pile for one or two seconds, said Bechtel spokesman Todd Nelson.

Bechtel cordoned off a small zone around the pile and collected samples to analyze. So far, it does not have a theory on what caused the flame.

Cleanup work began on the site three months ago. It was primarily used as a garbage dump and burn pit in the 1950s and 1960s. No radioactive materials are expected to be found there.

However, the site is next to the 618-4 site, in which a previously unknown collection of 786 barrels containing uranium chips and oil was discovered in 1998. The last of the barrels was removed from that site last October.

9 JAN 03

## Hastings helps push for Hanford cleanup

U.S. Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., was among eight congressional members who sent a letter to President Bush on Wednesday to ask for continued support for the Department of Energy's accelerated nuclear cleanup efforts in fiscal 2004.

The administration, including DOE, is expected to unveil its fiscal 2004 budget request to Congress in early February.

Congress has not yet passed a fiscal 2003 nuclear cleanup budget, which covers the first year of DOE's accelerated cleanup efforts. The proposed \$7 billion appropriation, including a possible \$1.893 billion for Hanford, has passed the appropriate committees in both congressional chambers but has not yet reached full floor votes in the U.S House or Senate.

Fiscal 2003 began Oct. 1. DOE sites currently are operating under lesser fiscal 2002 budget levels until the 2003 budget is nailed down. That means Hanford has operated the first three months of fiscal 2003 under a 2002 budget level of \$1.776 billion.

DOE has not provided any hints on what it plans to request for its fiscal 2004 nuclear cleanup budget.

# Attorney seeks to recuse judge in long-running Hanford suit

By The Associated Press

SPOKANE — An attorney representing Hanford downwinders in a personal injury lawsuit has asked a federal judge to bow out because he owns orchards and other property near the nuclear reservation.

Some of U.S. District Judge Alan McDonald's holdings are in Franklin County near Ringold, where the most radiation from Hanford was released during the Cold War, Seattle attorney Tom Foulds said in the motion filed Dec. 23.

McDonald has a financial interest in the lawsuit because the value of his land and crops could be diminished by a finding that Hanford radiation releases caused health problems in the area, Foulds said. He represents 2,000 downwinder plaintiffs.

A secretary in McDonald's Yakima office said Tuesday that he could not comment on pending litigation.

The motion likely will be rejected because it was filed very late, said John Strait, a legal ethics professor at Seattle University Law School.

"This case has been going on for 13 years," he said. "The plaintiffs would like to get out from under McDonald."

No other downwinders' attorneys have joined in Foulds'

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**It shows some desperation on the part of the plaintiffs, and it is based on information that has long been available.**

Keven Van Wart, of law firm Kirkland & Ellis

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motion, said an attorney for the defendant contractors who ran Hanford during the Cold War.

"It shows some desperation on the part of the plaintiffs, and it is based on information that has long been available," said Kevin Van Wart of Kirkland & Ellis, a Chicago law firm representing General Electric Co. in the case.

The Hanford case alleges personal injury to thousands of downwinders, not property damage, and the plaintiffs haven't proved there's plutonium lingering in soils near Hanford, Van Wart said.

McDonald has rejected claims that plutonium particles were released from Hanford, Foulds' motion said.

Judicial conduct codes for judges call for them to recuse themselves from cases if they could reasonably be perceived by

the public to be lacking in impartiality, he said.

A March 2000 story in The Spokesman-Review said the judge owned as much as \$39 million in agribusiness and other assets, making him by far the wealthiest federal judge in Eastern Washington.

The lawsuit was filed in 1990 after the federal government admitted releasing radioactivity from Hanford between 1944 and 1972. Most releases involved iodine-131, which has been linked to thyroid diseases, including cancer.

Foulds said he was unaware until recently the judge's holdings were so extensive and so close to Hanford.

After years of maneuvers and appeals, the case is headed for possible trial this year.

In November, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that McDonald erred in 1998 when he dismissed 4,500 downwinders from the case, leaving only about 200 free to pursue claims against contractors who ran Hanford during the Cold War.

McDonald ruled the majority of the downwinders failed to prove radiation doses from Hanford had more than doubled their cancer risk.

Attorneys will meet early this year to discuss how the case should proceed, Van Wart said.

## DOE unveils plans for site's tank wastes

■ *Hanford experts, observers still seek more information*

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy has unveiled its potential master plans for getting rid of Hanford's radioactive tank wastes.

The most likely approaches would glassify 47 percent of the site's tank wastes and explore other ways to deal with the rest.

After taking a first look at those proposals Thursday, Hanford experts and observers are not sure what they think of DOE's possible plans.

Bottom line: Washington's Department of Ecology and the Hanford Advisory Board's tank waste committee want more information before deciding whether to support or oppose DOE's plans.

"We're unanimous in that we want all the wastes to be taken

See **Wastes**, Page B2

8 JAN 02

# DOE may face thousands in fines

## ■ EPA, Ecology send letter to DOE suggesting fines for 2 missed Hanford deadlines

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

Hanford has achieved one major milestone of the K Basins cleanup work that was to be done by Dec. 31.

But it missed two other less well-known deadlines, which could translate to fines.

On Tuesday, Fluor Hanford finished moving 1,053 tons of spent nuclear fuel from the K West Basin. That's a week behind the Dec. 31 Tri-Party Agreement deadline, but practically a bull's eye in the complicated, multiyear world of Hanford projects.

But Dec. 31 also passed with the Department of Energy and Fluor Hanford missing deadlines to begin removing radioactive sludge from the K East Basin and having T Plant ready to receive that sludge.

DOE faces potential fines of up to \$5,000 for the first missed week on each project, and up to \$10,000 per project for each subsequent week until the work is done, said a Monday letter to DOE from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state's Department of Ecology.

The EPA and Ecology have not made any decisions about potential fines.

Nick Ceto, EPA's Hanford site manager, praised Fluor and DOE for completing the K West fuel movement. "But we don't want to lose sight that there are other commitments out there," he said.

The K Basins are two water-filled indoor pools that originally held 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel 400 yards from the Columbia River. The K East Basin has leaked twice since the late 1980s.

DOE and Fluor have until mid-2004 to process and move all the fuel to a huge underground vault in central Hanford. The Tri-Party Agreement, the legal pact governing Hanford's cleanup, required that all 1,053 tons of the K West Basin's

fuel — ultimately within 185 canisters — be moved by Dec. 31.

The K West fuel movement has had a spurt-and-stall history, but kicked into warp speed several months ago and kept up the pace.

Fluor learned from its mistakes, overhauled project management, found ways to trim time while keeping safety standards high and fostered an atmosphere of focus and urgency, said Mike Schlender, DOE deputy manager for site transition at Hanford.

Meanwhile, the Tri-Party Agreement also required DOE and Fluor to:

■ Begin transferring fuel from the K East Basin to K West Basin by Nov. 30. K West Basin has the complicated equipment to process the fuel for the move to central Hanford. Fluor hit that mark Nov. 25.

■ Begin removing radioactive sludge from the K East Basin on Dec. 31. K East holds most of the 72 cubic yards of sludge in the two basins. The K East sludge removal appears likely to begin sometime this

spring, Schlender said.

■ Have T Plant, a huge 59-year-old plutonium processing plant in westcentral Hanford, ready by Dec. 31 to receive the K East sludge. Again, Schlender expects T Plant to be ready this spring.

T Plant has held 72 commercial nuclear fuel assemblies weighing 1,180 pounds from Pennsylvania in a water-filled pool in an old basement processing cell. Fluor has to move that fuel to the central Hanford underground vault and convert four to eight basement cells into storage chambers for the sludge.

Ceto and Larry Gadbois, the EPA K Basins project manager, see the delay in removing sludge from K East Basin as a serious environmental problem.

If K East leaks again, the mushy sludge is more likely to ooze through cracks than chunks of fuel, they said. One reason for the delay is that DOE and Fluor began analyzing the sludge later than they should



8 JAN 03

# Reach committee extension on tap

■ *Citizens advisory group's charter renewal likely to get signature by Saturday*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

The charter for a Hanford Reach National Monument citizens advisory committee is expected to be renewed for two extra years by Saturday.

Greg Hughes, the monument's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manager, told the committee Tuesday that the charter renewal document is at Interior Secretary Gale Norton's office and is expected to be signed no later than Saturday.

If not, the 13-member committee, including tribal, local government and conservationist representatives, will be

disbanded because its original charter will have expired.

The committee was created in 2000 to advise the Fish and Wildlife Service on creating a management plan for the 200,000-acre monument covering Hanford's buffer area. That area includes all of Hanford west of Highway 240 and north of the Columbia River plus the river's shore and islands.

Fish and Wildlife manages the monument, which is actually owned by the Department of Energy.

**Also Tuesday, the committee:**

■ Was updated on a \$6 million project to revegetate west Hanford's Fitzner-Eberhardt Arid Lands Ecology Reserve, which was devastated by Hanford's massive range fire in 2000.

The fire burned about 163,000 acres on the ALE and in central and southern

Hanford. About 25,000 to 30,000 acres of that contained mature sagebrush, with the rest being grasses.

The aerial seeding of 10,000 acres with native grasses was completed Sunday, said Heidi Newsome, Fish and Wildlife's biologist for the monument.

And earlier, workers finished planting about 700,000 sagebrush plants on 1,600 acres scattered in tiny clumps within the burn zone. It is expected to take five to 10 years for the tiny islands of sagebrush to grow and spread across the burned landscape, Newsome said.

The service is replacing the ALE's four-strand barbed wire fence along Highway 240 with a single-strand wire. Flammable tumbleweeds tend to stack up along the four-strand barbed wire. The single-

See **Reach**, Page B2

## Hanford observatory offers Saturday tours

15 JAN 03  
Hanford's Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory will be offering free tours at 1:30 p.m. on the second Saturday of every month. Learn about Einstein's theories of space and time, colliding black holes, exploding stars and the birth of the universe during the two-hour program.

LIGO is a monumental facility that uses leading technologies to listen for the "spacequakes" generated by the most violent processes in the universe. To get to the observatory, take Stevens Drive to Route 10 on the Hanford site and turn left. A map and more detailed directions are available at [www.ligo-wa.caltech.edu/traveler.html](http://www.ligo-wa.caltech.edu/traveler.html) on the Internet.

9 JAN

# Fluor aiding workers after layoffs

■ *Severance, discounted insurance, career counseling offered to laid-off employees*

**By Wendy Culverwell**

Herald staff writer

Probably nothing could prepare the 260 mostly white collar workers laid off by Fluor Hanford Inc. on Monday, but severance pay, discounted health insurance and career counseling could cushion the blow.

After months of public discussions about the pending layoffs, Fluor Hanford let 260 people go. That number eventually could swell to nearly 400 of Fluor's 4,000-plus local work force. Of those who lost their jobs this week, 177

workers did not volunteer to leave their positions.

Spokesman Michael Turner said most of those let go were white collar employees, engineers, budget analysts and other professionals.

All laid-off workers received a paycheck Monday for two weeks of work. Though their time is their own, Fluor encouraged its former workers to use the time to seek new jobs through a temporary career counseling center established near the Richland Airport.

In addition to a final paycheck, the workers received a week's salary for every year they worked for Fluor, up to 20 years.

The company also is offering discounted rates for those who wish to continue their medical coverage.

For the first year, Fluor will pay more than half the cost of insurance. After a year, it will split the cost and after that, former employees pay the full cost under the federal Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1986, or COBRA. COBRA allows most workers to remain in their former employer's group health insurance plan at their own cost.

The company has opened a career center to help those laid off search for new jobs.

The center offers job posting services, help with résumés, workshops and access to computers, the Internet and other office equipment.

Fluor also works with Columbia Basin WorkSource, a similar one-stop job hunting center in Kennewick. Turner said

Fluor created its center to complement the WorkSource Center and to offer laid-off workers assistance tailored to their circumstances.

The career center is at 1810 Terminal Drive in Richland and will remain open through next week.

The company cut its administrative work force as part of the effort to accelerate the Hanford cleanup. The company is shifting its emphasis to on-the-ground cleanup projects.

Not all those laid off were in management. Tom Schaffer, president of the Hanford Atomic Metal Trades Council, said nearly 50 blue collar employees were laid off, about 30 involuntarily.

■ Reporter Wendy Culverwell can be reached at 582-1537 or via e-mail at [wculverwell@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:wculverwell@tri-cityherald.com).

# Suitors line up to woo moneyed DOE

By Wendy Culverwell

Herald staff writer

Like so many characters in a Jane Austen novel, agencies from Mattawa to Connell are displaying their best attributes, hoping to attract the U.S. Department of Energy, or at least its money.

Just how much money DOE has to help Mid-Columbia cities, ports and other agencies pursue economic development projects is uncertain, but that didn't deter ports and others from submitting projects they want funded through the federal 3161 economic transition program.

The Tri-City area has received more than \$20 million in 3161 money since the program's inception in 1993, but the amounts have dropped in recent years and competition for what's left is fierce.

The Tri-City Industrial Development Council coordinates area 3161 grants for DOE and is also a recipient, using money it receives to recruit new businesses.

TRIDEC itself submitted five proposals. Other applicants include the ports of Benton, Kennewick, Pasco and Mattawa, Columbia Basin College, the Nuclear Medicine Research Council, the Tri-Cities Visitor and Convention Bureau, the Tri-Cities Enterprise Center, the Benton Franklin Council of Governments, Washington State University and the city of Connell.

Sean Stockard, TRIDEC's economic transition director, said he was surprised only a dozen agencies participated but chalked it up to better awareness of the kinds of projects DOE tends to fund.

There were no proposals, for example, to use 3161 money to build a shrine on Rattlesnake Mountain, as there have been in the past. In the broadest sense, the projects revolve around venture capital, infrastructure and tourism — three of the economic development

# 12 Mid-Columbia agencies seek possible DOE funding

By Wendy Culverwell

Herald staff writer

A dozen Mid-Columbia agencies submitted projects for possible funding through a federal Department of Energy program to help diversify area economies.

The Tri-City Industrial Development Council accepted applications for the 3161 program in December. It will evaluate and rank the projects and submit them to DOE headquarters, probably in the spring.

Some of the notable projects are:

■ The city of Connell will bring its new sewage treatment facility online this week, rendering its old facility on Highway 395 obsolete.

Art Tackett, city administrator, wants to turn the 30-acre site with highway access and utilities into an industrial park, but it will cost about \$100,000 to fill in the old ponds and complete studies needed before that can happen.

The city is asking for about \$80,000 for the project and will kick in \$20,000 of its own money.

community's top priorities.

Together, the projects offer a view of what's happening to reduce the region's reliance on federal spending at Hanford for its economic livelihood.

The Benton-Franklin Council of Governments wants \$200,000 for a revolving loan fund that supports risky companies, while the city of Connell needs \$80,000 to turn its old sewage plant into an industrial park.

The ports of Pasco and Benton both offered proj-

“We'd really like to get this done quickly,” said Tackett.

■ The Port of Mattawa has similar visions. It is seeking a \$200,000 grant to extend utilities and roads to a 53-acre industrial park on the west side of town.

■ The Tri-Cities Enterprise Center submitted two applications, one to continue a program that provides seed money for young and startup businesses and the second to recapitalize its microloan program, which provides small business loans.

TEC has received close to \$2 million in the past but has not had any new money to nurture promising young businesses in several years.

Bill Henderson, TEC president, is optimistic his proposals will make the cut.

“We have one of the lowest cost per job production rates in the program,” he said.

■ The Nuclear Medicine Research Council submitted two proposals, both related to developing a nuclear pharmaceutical industry in the Tri-Cities.

The council wants \$180,000 to demonstrate an

See **Funding**, Page B7

ects that qualify in the “bird in hand” category, meaning they need money to boost businesses that are either in the Mid-Columbia or are in the process of coming to the region.

The Port of Pasco offered two projects both to help Parsons Infrastructure, a fast-growing company that has successfully carved a niche for itself developing systems to neutralize the military's chemical weapons

See **Cashing**, Page B7

9 JAN

# Fluor Hanford earns \$368,000 less because of missed deadline

■ *But Fluor, federal officials happy with work past 7 months*

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

Missing a deadline by one week cost Fluor Hanford \$368,000 in profits.

If Fluor had made a Dec. 31 deadline to remove almost half of the K Basins' spent nuclear fuel, its contract with the Department of Energy would have provided it with a \$1.6 million fee — meaning profit.

However, the contract deducts 23 percent — \$368,000 — from the fee for missing the deadline. That means Fluor has earned \$1.232 million.

But Fluor and federal officials were overjoyed Wednesday as they discussed how the K Basins project went into overdrive the past seven months to finish removing 1,053 tons of spent nuclear fuel from the K West Basin on Tuesday.

The K Basins are two indoor, water-filled pools that originally held 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel 400 yards from the Columbia River. DOE and Fluor are processing the fuel and moving it to a huge underground vault in central Hanford.

The Tri-Party Agreement set two deadlines for moving the fuel.

The first was Dec. 31, which was when the K West's original 1,053 tons of fuel were supposed to be moved. The second is July 30, 2004, which is when all the fuel is to be moved.

“

**That represents a big success story for Hanford. Kudos to DOE. Kudos to the workers. Kudos to Fluor**

Larry Gadbois,  
EPA's K Basins project manager

”

The down-and-dirty way to track progress is to count the number of specialized fuel transportation-and-storage containers moved from the basins to the underground vault.

All 2,300 tons translates to about 400 containers. The first 1,053 tons equaled 185 containers.

Seven months ago, the project was significantly behind schedule, with 67 containers moved after 18 months of effort. Fluor then moved the final 118 containers in seven months.

After major regrouping last summer, the project picked up momentum. A pace of eight to 10 containers a month increased to 25 containers moved in December, and the final six the first week of January, said Norm Boyter, Fluor's vice president for the K Basins project. That was accomplished without any significant injury accidents last year.

“That represents a big success story for Hanford. Kudos to DOE. Kudos to the workers. Kudos to Fluor,” said Larry Gadbois, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's

K Basins project manager.

“The team really came together,” said Mike Schlender, DOE's deputy manager for site transition at Hanford.

“Moving the fuel ... represents the most significant cleanup accomplishment on the site in the last 60 years. ... I'm extremely proud of the crew out there,” said Dave Van Leuven, Fluor's executive vice president.

Van Leuven and Boyter were confident that Fluor can move all 2,300 tons of fuel by July 30. They believe the project likely will move 15 to 20 containers a month, a slightly less frenetic pace than the speed of recent months.

Meanwhile, DOE and Fluor missed two other Tri-Party Agreement deadlines Dec. 31. Fluor was supposed to begin removing radioactive sludge from the K East Basin and have T Plant ready to receive that sludge. Those milestones likely will be reached in April, Fluor officials said.

DOE faces growing potential fines under the Tri-Party Agreement for each week beyond Dec. 31 those two goals are not met. However, DOE's contract with Fluor does not penalize the company for missing those start-up deadlines. But Van Leuven speculated DOE could pass on part of any fines to Fluor, if the state and EPA levy penalties against DOE.

The DOE-Fluor contract penalizes Fluor if it misses the October 2005 target to finish removing all the water and sludge from the two basins.

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# Fluor could lose contract for FFTF shutdown

■ *Work could be awarded to small business, nuclear industry newsletter states*

By **Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford might lose the contract to permanently shut down Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility, according to a nuclear industry newsletter.

Transferring the contract to a small business would help the Department of Energy come closer to goals for contracts with small businesses that it's not able to

meet now.

"We hope that it is not being considered but even if it is, we present a good case that we would be the preferred contractor for deactivation and decommissioning," said Michael Turner, spokesman for Fluor Hanford.

Fluor has been in charge of standby operations at FFTF since 1996.

If the contract were awarded to a small business, Fluor still might have some involvement, perhaps managing the contract and overseeing work.

Fluor has proposed spending \$623 million to shut down FFTF by 2013.

Turner was unaware of any talks

between Fluor and DOE and said there had been no written communications. Under Fluor's contract, it's responsible for the nuclear reactor until about 2006.

DOE officials declined to discuss speculation of a contract change because of a lawsuit by Benton County over FFTF.

DOE had ordered work started to permanently shut down the reactor but agreed to halt work until March 12 after Benton County accused the federal government of not following environmental regulations.

Supporters of FFTF want it used for research needed to develop the next generation of nuclear energy reactors and for

private production of isotopes used in new medicines. The delay of shutdown for two more months gives supporters more time to win support for a plan of private operation of the reactor.

Weapons Complex Monitor, an inside-the-beltway newsletter on DOE's nuclear cleanup, reported recently that switching the contract could bolster DOE's efforts to award more contracts to small businesses.

It said that just 2 percent of DOE cleanup contracts now are awarded to small businesses, but its goal is 23 percent.

DOE officials were not able to confirm

those percentages Wednesday or Thursday.

At Hanford, 35.72 percent of \$46.8 million was spent on small business contracts in 2002.

However, the goal was 45.8 percent, said Rich Hague, small business program manager for the Richland DOE office.

DOE has not counted subcontracts awarded to small businesses by its prime contracts in its small business statistics since rules were clarified in 2000.

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11 JAN

# Reach citizens board expands

■ *Panel reauthorized, will grow to 19 seats*

**By Mike Lee**  
Herald staff writer

The Hanford Reach citizens advisory committee has survived the federal bureaucracy, but it metamorphosed Friday into a new form that could tip the delicate balance of its political interests.

Documents obtained by the Herald show the committee was reauthorized Friday by Interior Secretary Gale Norton with one day to spare before it

would have gone defunct.

In the process, however, the committee was expanded from 13 to 19 seats with the addition of three representatives for county governments, one for nearby cities, one for irrigators and one for tourism interests.

"Even though people will be coming on late, sometimes they may have something to add that might be helpful," said Jim Watts, chairman of the committee, which advises the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on a long-term management plan for the

See **Reach**, Page A2

15 JAN 03

# Vit plant construction lags behind

## ■ Lack of progress blamed on engineering problems

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

Hanford appears to be six to 10 months behind schedule on finishing its tank waste glassification complex because of engineering quality problems, a top official for the construction contractor said Tuesday.

Bechtel National is supposed to finish construction by July 2007. Unless it fixes and catches up on its engineering troubles, completion of the plant will likely be delayed until 2008, said Ron Naventi,

Bechtel's glassification project manager. Naventi called the news conference to discuss Bechtel's problems with its engineering quality and plans to fix those troubles.

Bechtel is building a central Hanford complex to glassify 25 million gallons of liquid radioactive wastes by 2028. The Department of Energy is exploring ways to deal with another 28 million gallons of the wastes by the same date.

Over the past few months, problems surfaced with the quality and timeliness of Bechtel's engineering work. That has slowed the project's design work to where it cannot keep up with construction.

Problems include management, coor-

dination and sloppiness. The troubles are complicated by the fact that about 75 percent of Bechtel's 1,800 engineers are relatively inexperienced with the nuclear industry's strict rules and with Bechtel's corporate culture, Naventi said.

DOE is withholding \$3 million in Bechtel's fees until the problems are solved. If, when and how much of that fee DOE will pay Bechtel depends on how fast the company recovers.

A series of reviews of the construction schedule and \$5.6 billion in estimated costs are scheduled from late January through mid-April, when Bechtel and DOE hope to have a revised budget and schedule completed

DOE plans to stick to the legal deadlines of having the complex fully operational by 2011, glassifying 10 percent of the wastes by 2018, and having all 53 million gallons dealt with a decade later, said Roy Schepens, manager of DOE's Office of River Protection.

"You need to face problems early on, and I view this as facing a problem early on," Schepens said.

DOE and Bechtel are considering asking Washington's Department of Ecology to renegotiate the Tri-Party Agreement's deadline of 2007 to glassify the first radioactive wastes as part of a



# \$3 million payment to Bechtel withheld

■ *DOE questions state of Bechtel's work, meeting 2007 Tri-Party deadline*

**By John Stang  
and Les Blumenthal**

Herald staff writers

Sloppy engineering has led to the Department of Energy withholding a \$3 million payment to Bechtel National, while also raising the question whether a 2007 legal deadline for Hanford to glassify its first radioactive tank wastes will be met.

DOE probably won't know until March or April whether it will approach the state about renegotiating the 2007 Tri-Party Agreement deadline to begin glassifying wastes in a complex being built in central Hanford.

But DOE still plans to stick to a 2011 deadline to have glassification operations at full speed, said Roy Schepens, manager of DOE's Office of River Protection.

DOE alerted Washington's Department of Ecology last week that it may seek changes to the 2007 milestone.

"We need to see more details on what that means. ... It's encouraging that DOE is telling us strongly that they plan to meet the 2011 deadline," said Sheryl Hutchison, state Ecology Department spokeswoman.

She said the state won't agree to any changes that jeopardize the 2011 milestone, or the legal deadline of 2018 to have 10 percent of Hanford's tank wastes glassified.

## Briefs

### **Gas card use gets Hanford officer fired**

A Hanford Patrol officer was fired earlier this month for using a Hanford gas card for personal use for up to two years.

Fluor Hanford, which oversees the Hanford security force, notified federal law officers, said Fluor spokesman Michael Turner. He said the company confronted the officer, who confessed and was fired.

Federal officers are investigating. Fluor declined to name the patrol officer or the amount of money involved but said it could lead to a felony charge. A felony theft involves \$250 or more. Fluor declined to identify what agency is conducting the investigation. The FBI could not be reached late Wednesday to comment on whether it is conducting the investigation.

## Public hearings set on Hanford tank wastes

26 JAN 03

Hanford officials will receive public comment on Feb. 5 on potential plans to dispose of Hanford's tank wastes.

The Department of Energy has scheduled the meeting at 7 p.m. at the Red Lion Hanford House in Richland. Similar public comment meetings are set for Feb. 18 in Hood River, Ore., Feb. 19 in Portland and Feb. 20 in Seattle.

The comments are to address an environmental impact study on how Hanford should treat and dispose of the 53 million gallons of highly radioactive wastes in the site's underground tanks.

DOE is leaning toward glassifying 25 million gallons, quickly disposing of 1.8 million gallons as low-level or transuranic wastes, and exploring new ways to neutralize the remaining 26 million gallons. Five plans on how to tackle the tank wastes are being considered, plus what would happen if no new plans are adopted. Later this year, DOE will name its recommendation in a draft report to start another round of public discussion. DOE expects to make its formal decision by April 2004.

— By the Herald staff

## **Hanford annual briefing scheduled Wednesday**

The annual Hanford "state of the site" briefing for the public will be Wednesday at the Benton County PUD auditorium, 2721 W. 10th Ave., Kennewick.

An open house with displays begins at 6:30 p.m. and the actual briefing starts at 7 p.m.

The top Northwest officials involved in Hanford's cleanup will discuss what has happened in the past year, plans for the future and answer questions.

They will include Keith Klein, Department of Energy Hanford manager; Roy Schepens, manager of DOE's Office of River Protection; Tom Fitzsimmons, director of Washington's Department of Ecology; and Mike Gearhard, administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Northwest region.

# HANFORD'S ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION PROJECT

WHAT A

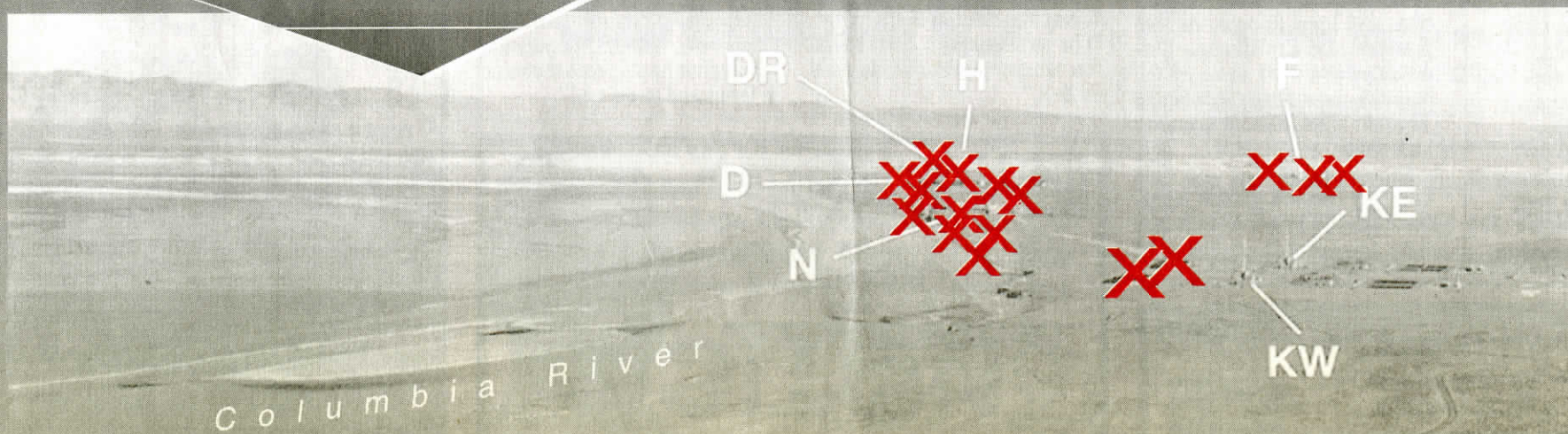
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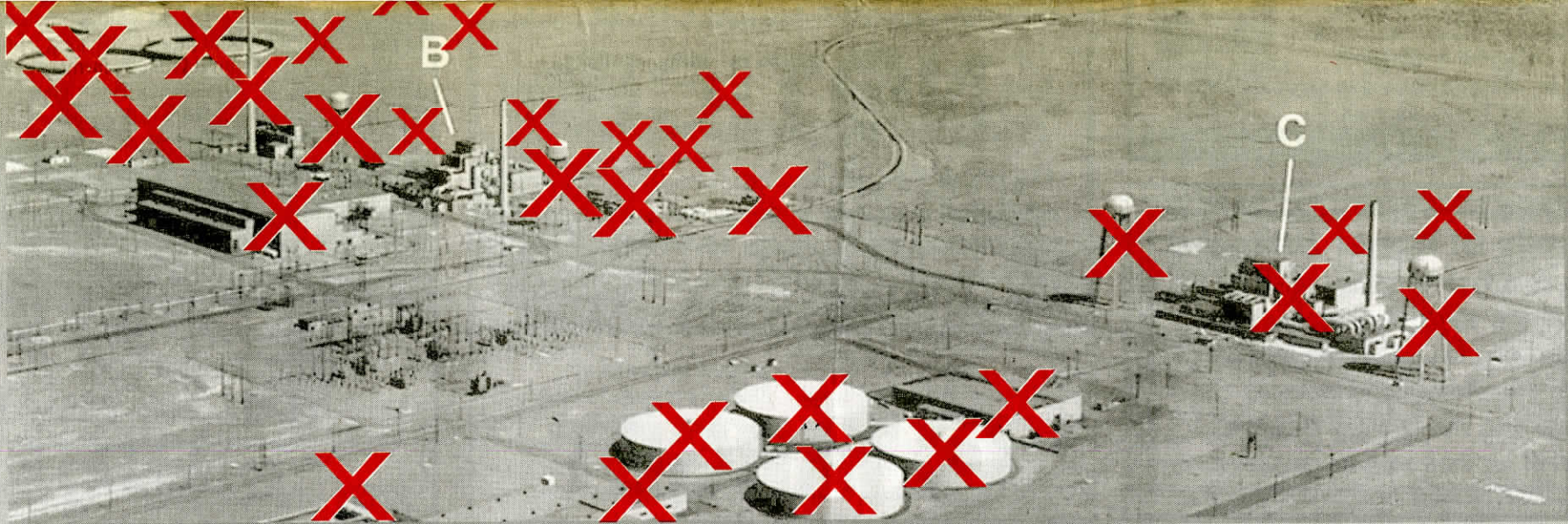
TEAM!

For the eighth year we take this opportunity to recognize our employees' accomplishments. They're making a difference at Hanford:

## Progress

- ✓ Reactors are safely cocooned
- ✓ Numerous nuclear-related facilities no longer exist
- ✓ Millions of tons of contaminated soil have been removed from the river corridor
- ✓ A large-scale facility to dispose of contaminated materials has been constructed and expanded to keep pace with cleanup





Cleanup progress along the Columbia River

... and, they're making a difference in our community, too:

- ✓ Extensive volunteer efforts
- ✓ Fundraising events to support community service organizations
- ✓ Leadership for civil and community organizations
- ✓ Supporting education

*"We had another very successful and safe year, mainly because of the ingenuity of our great people and project teams. Freeing up the work and getting out of their way to let them take control of the job is still our best recipe for success."*



**Bechtel Hanford, Inc.**

Mike Hughes, President

Our Team Includes:

**CH2M HILL Hanford, Inc.**

**Eberline Services Hanford, Inc.**

**Other Subcontractors**

**HAMTC - Hanford Atomic  
Metal Trades Council**

**Building Trades**

28 JAN 03

## ■ *Bechtel subcontractor's lease covers 40,000 square feet of warehouse, offices*

**By Wendy Culverwell**

Herald staff writer

A North Carolina company with a \$70 million contract to outfit the Hanford Waste Treatment Plant with ductwork will lease warehouse space from the Port of Benton.

Intermech, a subsidiary of Zellweger Luwa Group, has signed a renewable lease that covers about 40,000 square feet of warehouse and office space in the 1163 Building, also known as the former Hanford Central Stores facility.

The 120,000-square-foot warehouse has tens of thousands of square feet of office space and passed from the Department of Energy to the Port of Benton in

1998 along with the southern portion of the old Hanford Railroad and other buildings in the 1100 Area.

The transfer was intended to promote economic development by making unused federal assets available for new and expanding businesses.

Finding a paying tenant for the warehouse has been a top priority for the Port of Benton, and Intermech's decision to set up a fabrication shop there gives the port a long-overdue shot at breaking even on the 1100 Area, also referred to as Richland's Manufacturing Mall.

"This will put us in the black ... it saves us," said Scott Keller, executive director.

Under terms of the lease signed Monday, Intermech will lease 3,000 square feet of office space in the building's upper level and 37,600 square feet of fabrication and warehouse space below. The lease is for three years, with the option of three one-year extensions.

Intermech will pay the market rate of about \$3.38 per square foot for the warehouse space and \$9.03 a square foot for the office space. Both figures include leasehold taxes.

To free up room, the port renegotiated the lease with Nuvotec, a Richland company that nurtures promising energy and education companies. Nuvotec moved to the 1163 Building with considerable fanfare in 2001 and intended to use it for a clean energy laboratory. But Nuvotec failed to secure the investment dollars it needed to qualify for a state grant to upgrade the building, which curtailed its presence there.

Keller said Nuvotec agreed to give up 2,700 square feet, and the Department of Energy, which has occupied the facility in lieu of a paying tenant, gave up 10,000 square feet.

Nuvotec also agreed to convert to a straight lease and to forgo its option to

take over the entire building in 2004. It will begin paying rent in 2004, Keller said.

"They were very agreeable," he said.

Intermech will begin almost immediately to outfit its quarters to accept its equipment, said Hugh McPherson, president. Its contract with Bechtel calls for Intermech to start providing the components for the heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems by April.

That means it must move its fabrication equipment in, reroute power systems and make other modifications before then.

McPherson said his company liked the 1163 Building's proximity to Hanford and Bechtel's nearby equipment yard. The high ceilings and reasonable lease rates helped Intermech choose leasing over the alternative — building a new facility.

See **Firm**, Page B5

# Officials give 'state-of-site' address

■ *DOE reviews 2002, outlines goals for 2003*

30 JAN. 03  
By John Stang

Herald staff writer

Worries about toxic vapors at Hanford's tank farms topped a variety of public concerns about Hanford cleanup Wednesday.

About 100 people attended a "state-of-the-site" meeting Wednesday evening in Kennewick at the Benton PUD auditorium.

Department of Energy and regulatory leaders gave brief overviews of what Hanford had done in 2002 and what the site faces in 2003.

And 13 people asked questions of or made comments to Keith Klein, DOE's Hanford manager; Roy Schepens, manager of DOE's Office of River Protection; Tom Fitzsimmons, director of Washington's Department of Ecology; and Mike Gearhard, administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's

Northwest region.

The briefings touched on almost every Hanford topic from the glassification complex to transuranic wastes, painting an optimistic picture on a cleanup effort gaining momentum.

"I want to underscore that there has been a tremendous amount of progress out there," Fitzsimmons said.

The public's questions also covered a wide range of matters, with no one issue dominating the meeting.

## Highlights included:

■ Four rank-and-file Hanford employees voicing concerns about workers being exposed to toxic vapors at the site's tank farms. Two said that measures need to be upgraded to monitor chemical fumes, which they believe is a threat that gets lost in the shuffle of worrying about radiation.

"There's a blind eye being turned to people being exposed," said a tank farm worker, who declined to give his name.

Schepens said DOE is aware of

several employees' complaints about vapors. He said contractor CH2M Hill Hanford Group brought in an outside consultant to look into the matter, which concluded that CH2M Hill's industrial hygiene program is in good shape.

■ Three people saying DOE has downgraded its Tri-City economic transition efforts, arguing those efforts should be revived. Two people said some workers need better retirement packages, contending Hanford's programs don't match up to those at other DOE sites.

■ Todd Martin, chairman of the Hanford Advisory Board, saying the board views DOE's proposals to close 40 tanks by 2006 and find ways other than glassification to deal with more than half of the site's tank wastes are both "a slippery slope" that could distract DOE from ensuring conventional glassification is accomplished on time.

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# Board voices Hanford budget frustrations

■ *Hanford Advisory Board concerned uncertain budget may delay cleanup efforts*

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

Frustrations with Hanford's uncertain budget picture and whether it could be delaying or even harming environmental cleanup efforts were voiced by the Hanford Advisory Board's budget committee Wednesday.

The uncertainty is rooted in the fact that the federal site is supposed to start spending extra money in March to accel-

erate its cleanup efforts.

But the Department of Energy doesn't expect to find out how much money actually is available for accelerated cleanup efforts in fiscal 2003 until mid-February. That's a couple of weeks after DOE will submit its fiscal 2004 cleanup budget request to Congress on Monday.

In the meantime, DOE will operate at fiscal 2002's funding levels for almost six months into fiscal 2003.

On Wednesday, HAB members fretted about how long Hanford can operate at the lower 2002 funding levels without lagging behind in its accelerated cleanup effort.

And Keith Smith, a former Hanford

union official and current HAB member who represents the public at large on the board, said workers have told him they worry about the skewed budget picture. Not only do they fear future layoffs, he said, but some also fear safety could be compromised if preventive maintenance work is sacrificed.

DOE official Rich Holten, however, assured the panel the agency will hold its contractors to strict safety standards, adding those companies will lose fees if safety problems surface.

Usually, DOE has its congressional appropriations approved and divided among its individual sites, such as Hanford, by November, the second month of

the federal fiscal year.

But because of Congress' tardiness, DOE doesn't expect to have each site's fiscal 2003 budget determined until mid-February or March, said Jeanie Schwier, chief financial officer for DOE's Richland office.

March is when DOE has planned a massive injection of extra money to ramp up its accelerated cleanup plans for Hanford, she said. But she added that operating at 2002 levels until now has not delayed Hanford's acceleration plans.

This all assumes Congress soon approves an approximately \$7 billion nationwide nuclear cleanup budget with \$1.893 billion for Hanford for 2003.

But the U.S. House and Senate spending bills have not yet gone to a Senate-House conference committee to be reconciled, and there are differences in how much money each bill could provide Hanford.

DOE officials said Wednesday that if the \$1.893 billion survives intact, Hanford should achieve all of its Tri-Party Agreement legal deadlines in 2003, except for a pair of K Basins cleanup milestones missed at the beginning of this year.

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31 JAN 03

# Richland firm wins contract for Bechtel project

**By Wendy Culverwell**  
Herald staff writer

A prominent critic of the Hanford Waste Treatment Plant has won a \$2 million contract to develop a building where plant workers will receive their training.



**French**

Federal Engineers and Constructors, a Richland company led by Dick French, submitted the lowest bid to build a 16,000-square-foot facility for Bechtel National Inc. at the HAMMER training center in Richland's Horn Rapids area.

The simulator building will be FE&C's first major job as a general contractor. It will provide simulated control rooms where vit plant operators will learn to do their jobs.

Bechtel is the lead contractor for the

See **Project**, Page B2

# State needs strong Hanford role, Gregoire says

By Annette Cary

Herald staff writer

The lack of progress in dealing with transuranic wastes at Hanford demonstrates why the state needs to play a strong role at the nuclear reservation, Washington Attorney General Christine Gregoire said Friday in Kennewick.

Department of Energy officials face no deadlines for cleaning up those wastes, "and they have not done a dad gum thing," she said during a meeting with the Tri-City Herald's editorial board.

Washington agreed not to contest a DOE plan to send more transuranic wastes to Hanford, if DOE and the state can agree by March 1 how to deal with the site's low-level, transuranic and mixed radioactive-chemical wastes.

Transuranic wastes include barrels of junk — such as empty paint cans — contaminated by highly radioactive materials with slow decay rates.

The measures the federal and state governments agree to would be added to milestones in the Tri-Party Agreement, the legal pact that governs Hanford cleanup.

Gregoire also has concerns about progress on dealing with radioactive tank wastes at Hanford.

The \$5.6 billion waste vitrification plant to deal with those wastes may not start glassifying radioactive material in test runs until 2008, a year behind the current Tri-Party Agreement deadline.

"We've lost a year?" she asked. "I'm very unhappy we can't do the hot start on time."

However, she was impressed that concrete has been poured to start building the plant, a step she sometimes worried would never happen.

The vitrification plant will not be able to turn all the waste from Hanford's underground tanks into a safer glass form and make existing schedules.



Gregoire

DOE is proposing alternate technologies for some of the waste. While that may seem like a good idea, those technologies don't exist now and cannot be incorporated into the plant design, she said.

A DOE regulation that could allow DOE to reclassify some high-level waste also concerns her. Some waste that has been considered high-level so far would not be processed into a safer form if reclassified under an accelerated cleanup plan.

Hanford has a history of projects that are started, but never completed, she added.

Gregoire also discussed issues she's asking the Legislature to address.

They include an anti-terrorism initiative that would allow law enforcement to

investigate and prosecute crimes that seemed unlikely before Sept. 11, such as deliberate contamination of the water supply.

The federal government would still handle crimes that resulted in first-degree murder charges. But the state could send a criminal to prison for life for terrorism that causes substantial injury to a person, damages a building and creates a risk of death to an occupant, or causes damage that disrupts medical, fire or other crucial services.

The proposed laws are intended to focus on those who intend to cause serious harm, rather than, for example, students pulling a dumb college prank, she said. Ecoterrorists also are unlikely to be charged under the tightly drafted laws, she said.

Unlawful possession of a weapon of mass destruction could be punishable by 20 years in prison. Other crimes, such as making terrorist threats, providing

resources to a terrorist or having a false identity for terrorist purposes would carry lesser punishments.

Her office also plans to continue work to police the Internet.

She is proposing to expand Washington law to protect children on the Internet by making it a crime to communicate for immoral purposes not only with a child, but also someone the predator believes to be a child. That will allow detectives to pose as children to catch on-line predators.

Consumers would have more power over Internet spam — unsolicited or deceptive e-mail — under a proposal that would allow recipients to take cases to district court.

Now the state files some high-profile cases against spammers, but cannot take on all cases.

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## ■ Agreement will help firm become major manufacturer of pipes for Bechtel, others

By Wendy Culverwell

Herald staff writer

A small Pasco company hopes to grow into a major pipe manufacturer under an agreement with the lead contractor on the Hanford Waste Treatment Plant.

Bechtel National Inc. has agreed to serve as a mentor to Timberline Process & Controls Inc., a privately-owned company that provides pipes and related materials and instruments to Bechtel and other customers.

The Mentor-Protégé program is sup-

ported by the Department of Energy.

Bechtel's contract to design, build and operate the \$5.6 billion waste vitrification project doesn't require it to take a small company under its wing, but the marriage made sense, said Carrie Brittain, small-business advocate for Bechtel. Bechtel has eight such protégés around the country

Bechtel will lend its business expertise, and in return Timberline will grow into a reliable supplier of building materials manufactured to the nuclear industry's exacting standards.

Timberline owner Randy Tweten has purchased 2 acres in the Horn Rapids Industrial Park and has an option for three more for a future 15,000- to 20,000-square-foot fabrication shop, which will employ as many as 75 union

craftspeople and other staff.

Tweten has nearly completed the manuals and paperwork associated with earning the Nuclear Quality Assurance designation but must complete an actual production job to finish the application process.

Being a protégé to Bechtel doesn't automatically guarantee future work for Timberline, but procurement officials suggest it's likely.

By helping Timberline expand its capabilities, Bechtel is assured a pipe manufacturer with NQA credentials is available to provide materials for future projects.

The Hanford vitrification project will require about 900,000 feet of pipe.

The mentor agreement gives Timberline the opportunity to be the sole source

supplier on some projects if its price is considered reasonable.

Tweten said his long-term vision for Timberline includes expanding in the Tri-Cities and becoming a supplier not just to Hanford, but also to the Department of Defense and commercial customers.

"I think the Tri-Cities is an incredible opportunity," he said.

As part of the agreement, Timberline is teaming with two small Western Washington companies that have NQA programs. Diamond B Constructors in Bellingham and Puget Sound Pipe in Kent are providing Timberline with materials it needs.

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## ■ *Awards given for new technologies developed at lab for practical use*

4 FEB 03

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

New technologies developed at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory are being put to practical use — preventing terrorism, helping communities prepare for disasters and curbing pollution.

The Federal Laboratory Consortium has given the lab three Excellence in Technology Transfer Awards for projects that accomplish those goals. The awards for 2003 bring the Richland lab's total to 54 since the program began in 1984. That is more than any other federal laboratory.

With the acoustic inspection device, or AID, developed at the lab, U.S. Custom Services can quickly and reliably check for contraband or explosives hidden in railroad or truck tanks.

It relies on ultrasonic pulses that pass through sealed containers of liquid, then assesses the return echoes that bounce off the far side of the container.

An AID looks like a cordless drill, but hold it up to the side of a railroad tanker of soybean oil and it will emit a soft clicking noise as the sound passes through the oil. If there's something floating inside or a concealed compartment, the sound waves will be interrupted and the clicking will stop, alerting the operator.

It also can identify many substances or pick out a single barrel

## ■ *Energy Department asks for \$2.042 billion*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy wants to increase Hanford's cleanup budget in fiscal 2004 by almost \$37 million or \$63 million, depending on how the numbers are crunched.

DOE sent a \$2.042 billion Hanford cleanup request to Congress on Monday.

"The initial numbers look relatively good. It certainly could be worse. Obviously, we always

have to wait for the details," said Todd Martin, chairman of the Hanford Advisory Board.

Sheryl Hutchison, Washington Department of Ecology spokeswoman, said: "This is what we wanted to see. Clearly, we'll have to dig into it to see if there are any bugaboos."

DOE's Washington, D.C., headquarters kept a tight lid on its fiscal 2004 request, keeping those figures secret from most of its own people at Hanford until Monday. Consequently, local DOE officials have just begun

See **Hanford**, Page A2

# HAB briefed on transuranic waste cleanup schedule

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Hanford officials are mapping out a timetable to remove transuranic wastes from the site.

The Hanford Advisory Board was briefed Thursday on recent arrangements between the Department of Energy and Fluor Hanford to clean up transuranic wastes.

Those arrangements are expected to lead to a significant increase this year in Hanford's shipments of those wastes to an underground storage site at Carlsbad, N.M., said George Sanders, DOE's acting assistant manager for Hanford's

central plateau.

Hanford sent less than 10 truckloads to Carlsbad in 2002.

Right now, Hanford has 960 cubic meters of transuranic wastes stored above ground, with another 1,000 cubic meters expected to be created through 2006. That translates to 432 truck trips to Carlsbad.

Transuranic wastes are junk in barrels contaminated with highly radioactive particles with extremely slow decay rates.

A significant amount is already stored at Hanford from decades of nuclear weapons work at the site.

More transuranic wastes also are expected from future cleanup work.

DOE also sees Hanford as a likely processing point for transuranic wastes from small DOE sites before they are shipped to the Carlsbad storage site.

DOE and the state are now negotiating a timeline for treating and shipping transuranic wastes. The state wants deadlines to hold over DOE.

If those talks are not resolved by the end of March, the state has threatened to file a lawsuit against DOE to stop Hanford from receiving transuranic wastes from other sites.

Right now, the state has agreed to not oppose DOE sending a small amount of transuranic wastes to Hanford from sites in Ohio and California.

Sanders and Steve Wiegman, senior technical adviser at DOE's Office of River Protection, told the HAB the following:

■ Fluor will be contractually charged to have all of Hanford's transuranic wastes stored above ground and ready to send to Carlsbad by the 2006 expiration date of Fluor's site management contract.

■ Fluor will dig up about 15,000 barrels — more than 3,000 cubic meters — of transuranic wastes currently buried at Hanford, and process that material for eventual shipment to Carlsbad. By Dec. 31, Fluor is supposed to have a plan ready for dealing with the rest of the site's buried transuranic wastes.

■ Hanford currently has about 7,000 cubic meters of mixed chemical and low-level radioactive wastes stored above ground.

Fluor is supposed to reduce that volume to 500 cubic meters by 2006, but another 1,100 cubic meters of mixed wastes are expected to be produced during this time.

Most of those wastes can be treated at Allied Technology Group's Richland plant, but Fluor is looking for ways to treat about 600 cubic meters that can't be treated there.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-city-herald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-city-herald.com).

6 FEB 03

# Monitors trigger Hanford alarms

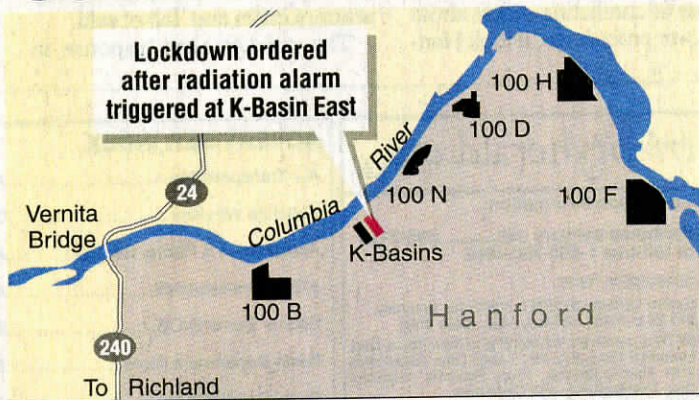
■ *False alarms cause evacuation of boaters, workers along shore*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

Hanford informed Mid-Columbia emergency centers about radioactive emission alarms going off in the K East Basin almost 3½ hours after the first was activated Wednesday and more than 1½ hours after the last two went off.

The alarms were false, caused by problems in three air monitors at the indoors K East Basin.

But the alarms led to evacuations from the string of nine defunct reactors along Hanford's Columbia River shore, including



Herald/Sherry Emery

boats on the river. People at the K Basins and N Reactor were ordered indoors as a safety precaution against possible airborne contaminants. No one was contaminated.

Information was unavailable

Wednesday on how workers and boaters were affected.

The K East Basin is the more radioactive of two indoor water-filled pools holding more than

See **Alarms**, Page A2



## **Bechtel National plans vendor forum Feb. 18**

9 FEB 03

Bechtel National has scheduled a forum for vendors and prospective vendors from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Feb. 18 at 3000 George Washington Way, Richland.

At the forum, Bechtel will discuss upcoming procurement and subcontract opportunities at Hanford's radioactive waste glassification plant construction project.

Space is limited to the first 150 registrants. To register, send an e-mail to [tlwallac@bechtel.com](mailto:tlwallac@bechtel.com), go to [www.ebechtel.com](http://www.ebechtel.com) on the Web and click on the link for "Hanford Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant" or call 371-5565.

## **Free tours offered of Hanford LIGO facility**

8 Feb 03

Free tours will be offered of the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory at Hanford at 1:30 p.m. every second Saturday of each month.

The next LIGO tour will be today. For more information, call 372-8125 or 372-8106, or visit [www.ligo-wa.caltech.edu](http://www.ligo-wa.caltech.edu) on the Internet.

**— By the Herald staff**

# Tank farm worker vapor complaints up 14 Feb 03

Worker complaints of potentially harmful vapors at Hanford's tank farms took a big jump in January.

For all of 2002, tank farm operators recorded 20 complaints in which workers thought they inhaled suspected vapors from chemical and radioactive wastes stored at the tank farms, according to CH2M Hill Hanford Group and the Department of Energy.

Most of the complaints involved ammonia or organic chemical fumes. The rate of incidents took a big jump last month, when five complaints were recorded, DOE and CH2M Hill officials said.

All of the complaining workers were checked either at a Hanford Environmental Health Foundation aid station or at Kadlec Medical Center, the officials said. With the exception of one worker who was found to have a preexisting case of bronchitis, everyone checked was found to be healthy and returned to work the same day. Hanford officials speculated that the number of inhalation complaints will go up at the tank farms as more wastes are transferred within the area as workers prepare to melt the wastes in a \$5.6 billion glassification plant now being built.

## ■ *DOE to determine if any new measures need to be adopted*

7 Feb 03  
**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Mistakes in the routine maintenance of air monitors led to Wednesday's "take cover" incident at Hanford's K East Basin.

On Thursday, the Department of Energy and Fluor Hanford sorted out what happened when two series of false alarms went off, eventually halting work along Hanford's river-front reactor area.

Now, DOE will concentrate on figuring out what lessons were learned from the incident and determining if any new measures need to be taken, said Mike Talbot, DOE's manager of Hanford's emergency management program.

The roots of Wednesday's false alarms were the daily checks of air monitors in the K East Basin.

K East is the most radioactive of the two K Basins, which are indoor, water-filled pools that hold more than 1,100 tons of spent nuclear fuel 400 yards from the Columbia River and about 35 miles northwest of Richland.

During Wednesday's daily checks, the filters in three air monitors were replaced and mistakenly installed backwards. Therefore, they collected relatively benign radon particles very quickly, which triggered the alarms at 11:55 a.m., said Talbot and DOE spokeswoman Colleen Clark.

The alarms erroneously indicated the release of alpha particles, one of the three basic particles that a radioactive substance might emit. But at the same time, other detection measures showed no release of any radioactive emissions, Talbot and Clark said.

Consequently, the correct procedures were to evacuate the K East Basin and send properly equipped workers back in to check on what happened, they said.

When the workers checked the air monitors, they found the wrongly inserted filters and fixed that problem. But during the fix-it work, they apparently broke a sheath in one monitor and bumped a switch in another monitor to make it extra sensitive, Talbot and Clark said.

Soon, those two alarms went off at 1:55 p.m. — again apparently set off by radon.

The second series of alarms falsely signaled that both alpha and beta radioactive particles had escaped, which triggered a greater level of

# Dear HEHF staff

As employees of Hanford Environmental Health Foundation, you have done an outstanding job over the past year. In striving to meet the day-to-day needs of the Hanford site workers and contractors, you have listened, responded, and upgraded skills and services to a superior level. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed, and we are pleased to see your work singled out and celebrated in a variety of areas.

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations rewarded your clinical and operational expertise. The Washington State Psychological Association honored your high level of commitment and programming in employee health and safety. And the Department of Energy-Richland Operations cited your good work in meeting the needs of their contractors and Hanford site workers.

Recognition of excellence from your peers, colleagues, and professional credentialing organization is the highest accolade you can earn. And you have certainly distinguished yourselves this past year.

We'd like to express our pleasure and appreciation for the nearly 100 employees of HEHF. You have not only performed admirably at your individual jobs, but also pulled together as a cohesive team to achieve outstanding results for the overall company.

We applaud your efforts and heartily congratulate each and every one of you. We are all proud of you and thank you for your outstanding service.

**HEHF Board of Directors**

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18 Feb 03

## ■ *New head of Richland lab aims to grow area's scientific community*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

The new director of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory envisions opportunities to help more research reach consumers and build a stronger scientific and technical community in the Tri-Cities.

Leonard "Len" Peters was the obvious choice among five strong finalists to lead Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, said Battelle Chief Executive Carl Kohrt as he accompanied Peters on an introductory visit to the lab Monday.



**Peters**

"It wasn't the résumé so much as it was the person — his clarity of thinking and his ability to work across many disciplines," Kohrt said. Battelle operates the Richland lab for the Department of Energy.

Peters, who has been the vice provost for research at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, has experience in nurturing interdisciplinary research and bringing science to the marketplace that he plans to use at PNNL.

"PNNL because of the kinds of

See **PNNL**, Page A2

# Hanford's '03 budget, other funding likely to get president's OK

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Hanford's 2003 fiscal year budget and some federal appropriations for Richland are expected to be headed today to President Bush for his signature.

The U.S. House passed a collection of 11 appropriations bills Thursday, and the Senate is expected to pass the same package today, according to the staff of U.S. Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash.

Those bills included the Department of Energy's environmental cleanup budget, as well as money to help replace Richland's water lines, upgrade a highway interchange and put in a transponder landing system at the Richland Airport.

DOE's environmental cleanup program is to get almost \$6.9 billion, including \$1.27 billion for Hanford's Office of River Protection and \$852 million to DOE's Richland office.

That would be \$2.122 billion for fiscal 2003.

That figure includes money to maintain and shut down the Fast Flux Test Facility and to fund Hanford's security, both of which were not calculated in previous years' cleanup budgets.

Hanford 2002 cleanup budget was \$1.893 billion, which did not include money for the FFTF and security.

Fiscal 2003 began Oct. 1,

which means Hanford has been operating at smaller 2002 budget levels since then.

After Bush signs the appropriations bill containing DOE's money, the federal agency's Washington, D.C., headquarters will do some final juggling before allocating 2003 funds to Hanford and other cleanup sites. Consequently, Hanford's 2003 budget might change slightly.

Thursday's package of 11 appropriation bills also include:

■ \$522,000 to help Richland replace leaking water lines. Since 1995, Richland has been replacing water lines installed in the 1940s and 1950s. This is the first time federal money has been received to help with that work, said City Manager John Darlington. So far, Richland has replaced 38.4 miles of water lines at a cost of \$16.6 million to its residents. The city still has another 16 miles of lines to replace.

■ \$3 million to upgrade the Interstate 182-Highway 240 interchange next to the Richland-Pasco bridge. A project to expand the bridge into eight lanes is being put out for bids. The interchange upgrades would be coordinated with the bridge work.

■ \$2 million to install a transponder landing system at the Richland Airport.

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18 Feb 03

# Hanford's 'enterprise' firms making strides in business

■ *Semi-independent companies finding success off nuclear site*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Slightly more than half of Fluor Federal Services' revenue in 2002 came from outside of Hanford.

That's the farthest that any of Hanford's former "enterprise" companies has weaned itself from being dependent on the nuclear site.

And it is the first time that a former enterprise company's non-Hanford income has exceeded its Hanford revenue.

That was the game plan mapped out in 1996, when Fluor took over site management and created six enterprise companies.

A major reason that Fluor won the contract was that the Department of Energy liked its economic development plan for creating new jobs in the Tri-Cities. The enterprise companies were the biggest plank of that plan.

By last September, the original six semi-independent companies with about 2,200

See **Enterprise**, Page A2



27 R-26 03

# New technology proposed for Hanford wastes

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

Former Gov. Dan Evans asked Hanford to consider a new way to divide radioactive materials in its tank waste glassification project at a Thursday hearing on tank farm issues in Seattle.

The proposed technology — dubbed a Plasma Mass Filter — is supposed to separate highly radioactive substances from slightly radioactive materials within Hanford's 11 million gallons of high-level radioactive wastes earmarked for glassification.

Evans contended this new technology will reduce the amount of high-level radioactive wastes to 25 percent of the original volume.

Earlier this week, DOE officials said they've kept tabs on this venture but need to more information before accepting or rejecting it.

This technology is scheduled to leave the drawing board and begin full-scale testing with nonradioactive materials next Friday in San Diego.

The Plasma Mass Filter is being developed by a 4-year-old San Diego company, Archimedes Technology Group, specifically for Hanford's tank wastes. Evans is on Archimedes' board of directors. John Waggoner, the Department of Energy's Hanford

manager for most of the 1990s, is Archimedes' vice president for nuclear programs.

The company has closely followed Hanford's stop-and-go glassification efforts since the late 1990s but has kept a low profile until now.

Hanford is building two plants to glassify almost half of Hanford's 53 million gallons of radioactive tank wastes by 2028. The rest of the wastes are to be neutralized by other means still being studied.

Hanford's complex will have a chemical plant that will separate the tank wastes into 11 million gallons of high-level wastes and 42 million gallons of low-activity wastes. Two high-level melters and two low-activity melters are supposed to glassify all the high-level wastes and a significant portions of the low-activity wastes.

Archimedes contends it can decrease the volume of high-level wastes so one melter can handle all of it. The Plasma Mass Filter would use electro-magnetic fields that separate highly radioactive substances from the rest of the materials mixed together in the high-level wastes. This system can accept a wide range of radioactive substances and chemicals, meaning waste funneled through it could possibly bypass the chemical separations plant, and company officials said in a phone inter-

view. While its components have been tested, the entire Plasma Mass Filter has never been operated before as a single piece of equipment, said John Gilleland, the company's president.

Gilleland hoped full-scale testing will be done late this year. He said the Plasma Mass Filter is compatible with Hanford's current glassification, and that the complex's construction can continue as planned without worrying about the proposed added filter facility.

Archimedes believes its facility will easily mesh with the other glassification construction under way, being ready by Hanford's target of 2007 or 2008 to begin glassification.

"We're not asking anyone accept us until we show a proven technology," said David Gerson, Archimedes' board's vice chairman.

Archimedes invested \$50 million into its test prototype and expects building a Hanford facility would cost about \$300 million. Archimedes proposes to pay all those costs itself. The company contends its equipment will significantly trim the glassification complex's costs, and it proposes that DOE pay it a percentage of the money that is saved by its project.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).

# ■ 5 sites being proposed for interpretive center

19 Feb 03

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

Southern Columbia Point in Richland appears to be the front-runner of five proposed sites for a proposed Hanford Reach interpretive center.

## Center

Richland City Council OKs land for Reach center. **B2.**

A Tri-Cities Visitor & Convention Bureau ad hoc committee expects to receive a consultant's recommendation on a location Feb. 28. The committee could make its decision as early as that date.

Other sites being considered are 16 acres south of Richland's Shilo Inn, 25 acres of Port of Benton land upstream of the Washington State University Tri-Cities campus, 85 acres of federal and Franklin county land upstream of the Pasco-Richland bridge, and several acres in Columbia Park next to the Edison Street entrance.

The interpretive center is supposed to provide the public with information on the culture, environment, history and wildlife of the Hanford Reach National Monument. It's still in early planning stages without a site, location, price tag or building plans.

The Tri-Cities Visitor & Convention Bureau is the lead agency in plans for the interpretive center for the fledgling national monument that covers Hanford's rivershore area, the Wahluke Slope and the Fitzner-Eberhardt Arid Lands Ecology Reserve.

The bureau's ad hoc committee on the project includes representatives from Mid-Columbia governments, area ports, Friends of the Hanford Reach and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

After the committee pins down a location, it will tackle architectural plans and budgets.

# Private firm offers plan to save, restart FFTF

21 Feb 03  
■ Proposal delivered this week to officials in D.C.

By Annette Cary  
Herald staff writer

A private corporation is forming to attempt to lease Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility from the Department of Energy and restart it to make isotopes and support the nation's energy policy.

Since November when Benton County succeeded in temporarily halting the permanent shutdown of FFTF, volunteer John Deichman has been working on a business plan for the reactor.

Deichman of Richland, a former executive manager at Hanford, and Ted Strong of Grandview, the former director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, are the two members publicly named on the new corporation's board. They are calling the corporation Mirari Isotopes, meaning "miracle cure" isotopes.

Oliver and Deichman returned Thursday to Richland after presenting Mirari's new business plan in Washington, D.C., to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, officials of the AFL-CIO and DOE's director of Indian affairs.

Democratic and Republican administrations ordered the reactor permanently shut down, saying they had no use for it.

But supporters of a restart believe the Bush administration's energy policy will require a fast reactor, such as FFTF. FFTF could be used for research needed to develop programs to transmute nuclear waste, or reduce its volume and toxicity, and developing the next generation of nuclear reactors.

Other options for doing that work are limited.

French and Japanese reactors that could do the "proof of concept" work for the projects but will be at their age limit by the time the projects are ready for testing.

Although Russia has reactors, it's not clear whether that country has the research capabilities, according to the

group Citizens for Medical Isotopes.

In addition, "there has never been a U.S. certification program authenticated through foreign tests," Oliver said.

But while research capabilities for the nation's energy policy might be the carrot to interest DOE in restarting the reactor, the Mirari business plan calls for producing isotopes to be the major use of the reactor.

That would include isotopes for medicines, including promising new cancer treatments, and for protecting the nation's food supply through irradiation.

Because some of the most promising medicines would be made from isotopes that would lose half of their radioactivity within a few hours, Mirari envisions a medical clinic built near FFTF to treat patients from across the nation.

Deichman estimates that medical research and treatments using isotopes in the United States are five years behind Europe because isotopes are more readily available there.

Mirari is proposing a 30-year lease of

FFTF and likely will ask that DOE give the corporation the \$623 million the government has estimated it will need to close the reactor. Mirari would then be responsible for that work.

The corporation is not releasing other details of plans for financing to restart the reactor.

It estimates that it would need two years to set up the corporation — it's in the process of filing incorporation papers with the state — and transfer the reactor from DOE. Then it would need three years to get the reactor ready to restart, including replacing outdated computers, mapping all the piping and building equipment needed to get targets that can be processed to move isotopes in and out of the reactor while it is operating.

During its third year of operation, it would begin to show a profit under the business plan, Deichman said.

The organization is in discussions with an unnamed company that has employees who have operated FFTF to run the reactor for Mirari, he said.

Mirari also is preparing a plan to regulate the reactor, although Deichman said he would first discuss it with DOE. But he said that while the Nuclear Regulatory Commission traditionally regulates private commercial nuclear reactors, DOE is more familiar with FFTF.

While Mirari and Oliver are working for federal support for the plan to restart the reactor, time is running short. Work to drain sodium from the reactor's cooling loops was to begin in November, but progress has been halted until March 12 under an agreement reached after Benton County filed suit in federal court.

Once sodium is drained, a restart will be more difficult.

Tuesday, Benton County and DOE attorneys will argue the case in federal court in Richland. The county maintains that DOE did not complete required environmental assessments before starting the shutdown.

■ Reporter Annette Cary can be reached at 582-1533 or via e-mail at [acary@tri-city-herald.com](mailto:acary@tri-city-herald.com).

26 FEB 03

# Judge says FFTF's days numbered

■ *Benton County loses suit, considers appeal*

**By Annette Cary**  
Herald staff writer

The Fast Flux Test Facility's days may be numbered at 30 after a federal court decision Tuesday cleared the way for the Department of Energy to continue a permanent shutdown.

Federal Judge Edward Shea ruled that Benton County had not made a case that DOE had failed to follow environmental regulations as it permanently shuts down the Hanford reactor. Rather than waiting for the dispute to go to trial, he ruled in the Department of Energy's favor.

DOE had been prepared to start draining the sodium from

November. Once sodium is drained, a restart would be difficult, if not impossible.

Shea's ruling lifted a temporary injunction against shutdown work agreed to by Benton County and DOE.

However, he then granted Benton County's request to bar work from proceeding at the reactor for 30 days while the county considers whether it wants to file an appeal. The clock starts ticking when Shea files his decision, which he said would be Monday at the latest.

If Benton County files an appeal, that does not mean the injunction against draining

24 Feb 03

# T Plant fuel removal falls behind

■ *Fluor Hanford says delay not likely to hurt K Basins project; cost may rise slightly*

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

Hanford has fallen at least 10 months behind schedule in removing spent reactor fuel from T Plant, where plutonium was once processed for nuclear bombs.

However, that delay should not hurt T Plant's ability to accept and store radioactive sludge from Hanford's K Basins on schedule, said Barry Burrow, Fluor Hanford's facility manager for T Plant.

And the delays are likely to lead to only a small increase in the cost of removing the fuel and not affect how much the Department of Energy eventually pays Fluor for the project, he said.

T Plant is the world's oldest functioning nuclear facility. It was built during World War II to extract plutonium from nuclear fuel irradiated in B Reactor.

The resulting plutonium-laced fluids were then refined into pure plutonium pieces, which were used in 1945 for the world's first atomic bomb that exploded in New Mexico, and in the bomb that destroyed Nagasaki, Japan.

Today, T Plant is used to store radioactive materials. Plans call for moving out spent commercial nuclear fuel stored there since the 1970s and for preparing to receive radioactive sludge to be removed from Hanford's two K Basins.

T Plant is one of Hanford's five Cold War processing plants dubbed "canyons" because of their cavernous main chambers, which measure 800 to 1,000 feet long and 50 to 60 feet high.

Beneath each of these main chambers are two parallel rows of shielded cells that

held the complicated equipment that extracted plutonium from the fuel rods.

The cells are covered by thick 30-ton concrete blocks — movable only with heavy-duty cranes — that make up much of the floors in the main canyon chambers.

In the 1970s, Hanford filled one of those basementlike cells with water. Then it stored 72 narrow rectangular spent fuel assemblies, each nearly 19 feet long, from the nation's first commercial power-generating reactor at Shippingport, Pa.

Now, Hanford workers are removing the fuel assemblies one by one from the cells, drying that fuel, putting it in specialized containers and storing it in a huge underground vault a few miles away.

The job was supposed to be completed Dec. 31, but the schedule has been pushed back nearly a year, until next October or November, Burrow said.

When a crane pulls out a fuel assembly, it drips dry while workers inspect it for

cracks and other flaws. Then four assemblies are put inside a special container, and the air and remaining moisture is vacuumed out to prevent the water from breaking down into a potentially explosive mix of hydrogen and oxygen.

All this work must be done by remote control. A worker walking unprotected inside T Plant's canyon would receive his maximum allowable annual dose of radiation in 10 minutes.

The first canister with four fuel assemblies was moved in early September. So far, Fluor has been able to move only 28 assemblies in seven containers, with 11 canisters still to go.

The main problem is the fuel assemblies turned out to have unexpected interior fissures holding more than the 6 ounces of water Fluor anticipated, Burrow said.

Instead, each removed assembly has

See **T Plant**, Page B2

# Briefs

25 FEB 03

## **DOE extends Battelle's contract to operate PNNL**

The Department of Energy has given Battelle another two-month contract extension to operate Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland.

Battelle was to begin a new five-year contract in October, but its old contract has been renewed three times while DOE works out proposed changes. The second contract renewal was to expire Friday. The new one expires April 30.

One issue remains for DOE to resolve, said Paul Kruger, associate manager for science and technology for DOE in Richland.

DOE wants to provide an incentive for the lab's research to produce a major scientific breakthrough, beyond the groundbreaking research it does each year.

The lab could earn a bonus in addition to other incentive fees for a breakthrough but still could be awarded the highest ranking of outstanding without achieving what DOE is calling a "grand challenge."

Most of the delay has been caused by efforts to streamline requirements for the lab in the new contract. It is planned to more closely reflect commercial standards and best practices, rather than a separate set of standards developed by DOE.

Once DOE headquarters approves the proposed contract, the entire contract still must be negotiated with Battelle and signed.

DOE announced in November 2001 that it would extend Battelle's contract without requesting proposals from other corporations to operate the lab because of Battelle's history of annual ratings of "outstanding." Battelle has operated the lab since 1965.

## Pension: Pay off debts one step at a time

Continued from B6

to make the trade-off of living with a lower score for a while to accomplish that goal.

Most debt-consolidation loans do exactly the opposite, however. Not only do they stretch your payments out longer, meaning you pay more in total interest, but often they also include high fees or other undesirable add-ons such as overpriced insurance.

You're usually much better off pursuing your own debt-repayment plan. Pay as much as you can on your highest-rate non-deductible debt — typically your highest-rate credit card. Make the minimum required payments on all your other debts until this highest-rate debt is paid off.

Then take the same amount of money and apply it to the next

highest-rate debt. Continue working your way through your credit cards in this way until you're debt-free.

You'll need to stop using your cards, of course. You can't get out of debt if you continually add to the pile.

If your main motivation for seeking debt consolidation is convenience, you can accomplish that without applying for another loan.

Most credit card issuers will take a monthly payment directly and automatically from your checking account if you authorize them to do so. You typically can specify the amount, direct them to take only the minimum payment or ask them to deduct the entire balance on the card.

In your case, you could set up all your credit cards so that the minimum balances are paid.

Then you can make one additional payment each month to the highest-rate card, either paying by check, online bill payment or at the credit card's Web site.

Remember, though, that you probably don't want to close these old accounts as you pay them off, unless you absolutely can't resist the temptation to run up balances again. Closing accounts can hurt your credit score, so accounts once opened are usually best left alone.

**■ Liz Pulliam Weston is a contributor to the Los Angeles Times and a graduate of the personal financial planning certificate program at the University of California Irvine. Questions can be sent to her at [asklizweston@hotmail.com](mailto:asklizweston@hotmail.com) or mailed to her in care of Money Talk, Business Section, Los Angeles Times, 202 W. First St., Los Angeles, CA 90012.**

## DOE gets set to accept bids for Hanford medical services

■ *Contract of company that currently provides services ends Sept. 30*

By the Herald staff

The Department of Energy should be ready to ask in the next month or two for proposals from companies interested in providing occupational medical services at Hanford.

The Hanford Environmental Health Foundation's contract expires Sept. 30. The company has held the contract for five years — the maximum allowed under the last contract awarded

for occupational medical services at the site.

A draft request for proposals would allow the next contract to be for three years but with extensions up to 10 years. The draft request still must be approved by DOE.

Most of the changes proposed, however, are to update terms and conditions, said Tony Lorenz, director of procurement for DOE's Richland office. The contract would reimburse costs and add a performance fee.

DOE has had inquiries about the contract from entities outside HEHF, Lorenz said.

Information included with the draft request for proposals indicates DOE will be looking for proposals that team with or mentor small businesses to provide some of Hanford's health services.

The contract covers services such as medical surveillance, diagnosis and treatment of injury or disease, counseling and health promotion to employees and emergency preparedness. The draft request for proposals advises that testing and oversight work are expected to increase to manage health issues such as beryllium disease and asbestosis of workers from past exposures.

## FFTF backers seeking more money for appeal

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

Citizens for Medical Isotopes believes it needs to raise \$10,000 by March 10 to convince Benton County commissioners to spend more money to appeal a court decision allowing the federal government to continue shutting down the Fast Flux Test Facility.

So far, the group has raised \$2,000 through donations.

Claude Oliver, a county commissioner and CMI president, said Friday that he's

not sure how the group will raise the remaining \$8,000.

Also on Friday, U.S. District Court Judge Ed Shea officially filed his previous ruling that the Department of Energy properly followed environmental regulations when it decided to shut down the dormant Hanford research reactor. Shea's action starts a 30-day clock for filing an appeal.

Citizens for Medical Isotopes believes \$20,000 to \$30,000 is needed to appeal Shea's ruling.

"We need to go in with a responsible

level (of CMI money) before we go (to the commissioners)," Oliver said.

With Commissioner Leo Bowman out of town Monday, the group is waiting until March 10 to approach the three-member commission to ask it to file an appeal and allocate money to do so.

Bowman and Commissioner Max Benitz Jr. said Friday that they need to read Shea's decision and consult with County Prosecutor Andy Miller before making up their minds.

Last November, Benitz was the loser on a 2-1 vote to spend \$70,000 for the

county's legal challenge of DOE's decision to permanently shut down FFTF. Almost all of that has been spent.

Oliver plans to vote for an appeal. His dual role as CMI president and county commissioner has him walking an ethical tightrope to avoid a conflict of interest. Citizens for Medical Isotopes thus is not a formal plaintiff in the litigation. CMI is a non-profit volunteer organization, and Oliver is not paid for his work with it.

He said he would view donations to CMI as feedback on how the public views the FFTF issue.

He said he believed Shea committed an appealable judicial error in that he ruled the county missed the statute of limitations to argue against DOE's environmental analysis on closing FFTF. Oliver and other CMI representatives contended the county was actually legally contesting DOE decisions from 2000 and 2001.

CMI sees the FFTF as the cornerstone of a major medical isotope production industry in Tri-Cities.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-city-herald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-city-herald.com).



3-3-03

# State, DOE split on toxicity of radioactive substance

■ *DOE says technetium 99 is low-activity waste; Ecology disagrees*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Technetium 99 is the poster boy of nasty Hanford radioactive substances.

It's highly radioactive. It seeps through the ground faster than most contaminants.

And with a half-life of 210,000 years, it will remain at full strength after many radioactive substances have decayed to almost undetectable levels.

The question is: Should Hanford treat technetium 99 as high-level waste or low-activity waste?

The Department of Energy wants to categorize technetium 99 as low-activity waste when the site converts its radioactive tank liquids and sludges into safer glass forms.

That's because technetium is a tiny fraction of Hanford's tank wastes. Plus DOE could signifi-

See **Substance**, Page A2

## **Hanford cleanup briefings planned in D.C.**

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sens. Patty Murray, D-Wash., and Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, plan to sponsor a series a briefings to provide information to other senators and congressional staffers on Hanford and other Department of Energy cleanup sites.

They are co-chairwoman and co-chairman of the Senate Nuclear Cleanup Caucus, which has strengthened congressional commitment to pay for cleanup efforts and ensure that the administration and Congress understand the importance of federal cleanup obligations.

Murray and Crapo plan 10 weekly briefings to explain the complex issues at different sites.

Briefings on Hanford are scheduled for today and March

3-4-03

# Citizens group rallies to raise funds to save Fast Flux Test Facility

■ *Group wants to get \$10,000 by Saturday to appeal shutdown*

**By Nathan Isaacs**  
Herald staff writer

A citizens group hoping to restart Hanford's test reactor has given itself until Saturday to raise \$10,000 toward the effort.

In a flurry of e-mail over the weekend, the Citizens for Medical Isotopes created five teams to lead its fund-raising efforts, with each group targeting a section of the community.

Benton County Commissioner Claude Oliver said the money is needed to help convince his fellow commissioners to spend more public money to appeal a federal court decision allowing the government to continue shutting down the Fast Flux Test Facility.

The group has less than 30 days to prevent that from happening.

The citizens group believes the reactor would be the cornerstone of a major medical isotope production industry in Tri-Cities. Also, Oliver said the reactor meets some nuclear testing needs being called for by the Department of Energy.

Oliver, who is also president of the citizens group, estimates between \$20,000 and \$50,000 is needed for the appeal.

Benton County Commissioners Max Benitz Jr. and Leo Bowman have said they won't make a decision on the matter until Monday's commission meeting.

So far, the citizens group has

“  
**I think it's important for the community to show its support.**

Claude Oliver,  
Benton County commissioner

”  
raised \$2,000 through donations. The five fund-raising teams will look for donations from organized labor, homebuilders and real estate agents, the medical community, cancer survivors, cancer fighters and finally the citizens group itself.

“I think it's important for the community to show its support,” Oliver said.

Oliver said the group has given itself a 2 p.m. deadline on Saturday to raise the money, but realistically it wants to get the money by Monday's meeting.

He said the citizens group may also look for help from television and radio in counting down to Saturday's deadline.

Oliver said the appeal is needed to get FFTF-proponents more time to convince the federal government that restarting the reactor is in its best interests.

Oliver is flying today to Washington, D.C., to take part in the annual Energy Communities Alliance meeting. He hopes to take advantage of the opportunity to lobby his case to anyone who will listen.

“There is a lot of momentum to pull this off,” he said.

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4 MAR 03

# Downwinders sought for study

■ *CDC to investigate whether exposure linked to heart, autoimmune disease*

By **Annette Cary**  
Herald staff writer

The federal government is investigating the rates of heart and autoimmune disease in people who may have been exposed as children to radiation that drifted off Hanford.

Over the last decade, public meetings about possible health effects of radiation releases have drawn large crowds of people asking if myriad health conditions they suffer might be linked to radiation exposure from living near or downwind of Hanford.

"(Some) feel very strongly that their

cardiovascular system was affected by the radiation," said Caroline Cusack, the epidemiologist leading the new study for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, or ATSDR.

The \$700,000 effort by the agency of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is driven by requests from a citizens advisory group that hears resident concerns, rather than scientific studies suggesting a link of the conditions to radiation.

Little, if any, scientific evidence exists to show that heart disease may be linked to radiation exposure. Limited studies may suggest a link between autoimmune disease and radiation, but they do not show the association to be as strong as it is for thyroid disease, Cusack said.

Because of the suspected association between radiation releases and thyroid dis-

ease, the CDC spent \$19.5 million on a 13-year study of those who grew up downwind of Hanford when plutonium was being produced.

Last year, the CDC's final report concluded Hanford downwinders were no more likely to have thyroid disease than those who lived elsewhere.

But the Hanford Health Effects Subcommittee suggested that those who lived downwind of the nuclear reservation while it was producing plutonium feared they were experiencing other health problems, Cusack said.

The list of possible problems was long, so ATSDR selected cardiovascular and autoimmune disease to study. Autoimmune illnesses occur when body tissues are attacked by the body's own immune system.

Researchers have randomly selected

4,500 people born between 1945 and 1951 in Benton, Franklin, Adams, Mason, San Juan and Whatcom counties. They must have lived in one of the counties for at least 12 months.

Benton, Franklin and Adams counties were selected because they are near Hanford. The other three counties were picked for their similar demographics to compare people born across the state from Hanford with those who lived near the site.

Researchers are hoping to find 2,000 of the 4,500 who are willing to participate in the study.

Letters have been sent to potential participants, but because of the difficulty finding people born more than 50 years ago, ATSDR is asking people born in those

See **Study**, Page B2

6 MAR 03

## ■ Justice gives state 45 days to prepare legal case to stop transuranic deliveries

By Chris Mulick

Herald Olympia bureau

OLYMPIA — The U.S. Department of Justice agreed Wednesday afternoon to suspend shipments of transuranic waste to Hanford for the next 45 days while Washington prepares its legal case to have them stopped altogether.

The state is expected to file a preliminary injunction Friday to halt near-term shipments until the lawsuit filed Tuesday in federal court over long-term waste deliveries can be resolved.

Oral arguments on the temporary

injunction are scheduled for April 18 in Yakima, and a decision is expected that day.

"We basically have to lay out our case," said Assistant Attorney General Joe Shorin.

The Department of Energy Richland office would not comment on the agreement Wednesday afternoon, and a spokesperson at the Washington, D.C., office could not be reached. It's that office that was responsible for pulling out of a preliminary agreement on handling of the wastes, which spawned the lawsuit in the first place, said state Attorney General Christine Gregoire.

"I am pleased that the justice department has taken steps to prevent a bad situation from getting worse," she said in a written statement Wednesday. "Now the federal court will be able to review our claims without the added complication of

more radioactive waste being shipped to Hanford from across the country."

Transuranic wastes, also known as TRU waste, are junk laced with highly radioactive transuranic materials, such as neptunium and plutonium, which have extremely slow decay rates. Hanford has thousands of barrels of the wastes, some above ground and some buried.

The tentative agreement reached in December would have produced milestones for the federal government to follow in its effort to remove the barrels. In exchange, the state would accept 170 barrels of waste from other sites to be checked and repacked at Hanford.

The state has allowed 40 barrels to be delivered as a showing of good faith, Gov. Gary Locke said this week.

But the March 1 deadline for producing the schedule came and went without a

final agreement. And DOE contends the state sought regulatory authority not allowed under federal law to oversee the wastes.

Wednesday's agreement will prevent two scheduled shipments of wastes to Hanford. Barrels due to arrive Wednesday from Ohio never left because of bad weather. Another shipment was scheduled to leave March 18 for Hanford.

"Washington state remains steadfast in its commitment to not accept any additional quantities of radioactive waste at Hanford until the Department of Energy has developed enforceable milestones for the removal of TRU waste from this site," Locke said in a written statement.

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10 MAR 03

# Hanford HAMMER facility's funding no longer uncertain

■ *Training program's fiscal 2003, 2004 budgets to stay level*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Funding for Hanford's HAMMER training complex appears likely to stay somewhat level for fiscal 2003 and 2004.

That expected level funding nullifies concerns that surfaced 10 months ago that the HAMMER facility would see major cuts in its budget and services.

HAMMER operated with a \$5.8 million budget in fiscal 2002.

For fiscal 2003, which began Oct. 1, HAMMER's budget had been hard to pin down because of changes in how overhead and other efforts were calculated within Hanford's overall budget. Other complications included Congress not nailing down the

Department of Energy's 2003 cleanup budget until last month, plus uncertainty because of the predicted war with Iraq.

"We kind of got caught in that vortex," said Jim Spracklen, DOE's director of home security programs at Hanford.

When all the 2003 figures were finally crunched, HAMMER's operating and overhead budgets appeared to end up at about \$5.7 million.

While a specific budget target has not been set for fiscal 2004, "our desire is for level funding (with 2003)," Spracklen said.

HAMMER, officially called the Volpentest Hazardous Materials Management and

See **HAMMER**, Page A2

## Section

# B

SATURDAY, MARCH 8, 2003

TRI-CITY HERALD

## Briefs

### **FFTF proponents raise more than \$10,000**

The group wanting to restart Hanford's test reactor says it has surpassed its goal of raising \$10,000 to appeal a recent federal court decision.

"We've blown right on by it," said Carl Holder of Citizens for Medical Isotopes. "The community response has been overwhelming. It's just amazing who showed up."

The exact amount raised won't be known until later today. But Holder said the group received money from throughout the Mid-Columbia.

The Home Builders Association of the Tri-Cities donated \$2,000 earlier this week.

Citizens for Medical Isotopes started its fund raising shortly after U.S. District Judge Ed Shea ruled the Department of Energy properly followed environmental regulations when it decided to shut down the dormant Hanford research reactor.

The group believes raising \$10,000 would show Benton County commissioners the community supports continuing the legal fight.

The commissioners are expected to decide whether to appeal the court ruling during their 1:30 p.m. meeting Monday at the courthouse in Prosser. The county has fewer than 30 days to file an appeal.

The citizen group believes the reactor could be the cornerstone of a major medical isotope production industry in Tri-Cities.

12 MAR 02

# State imposes transuranic waste deadlines on DOE

■ *Decision to have treatment, storage facilities in place by June 2012 linked to lawsuit*

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

The state has broken a deadlock in negotiations with the federal Department of Energy by unilaterally setting deadlines for DOE to treat Hanford's transuranic wastes.

Washington's Department of Ecology announced Tuesday that it has given DOE until June 2012 to have treatment and storage facilities in place at Hanford for those wastes.

And the state set an Aug. 31 deadline for DOE to submit a detailed plan and schedule for building those facilities.

The decision is linked to a lawsuit the state filed last week to block DOE plans to send more transuranic wastes to Hanford.

## Hanford

DOE still crunching numbers for Hanford's fiscal 2003 budget. **B2.**

The Tri-Party Agreement, the 1989 legal pact governing Hanford's cleanup, said DOE, the state and the Environmental Protection Agency were to set enforceable deadlines for Hanford to store and treat its own transuranic wastes.

But the state and DOE have never been able to agree on those deadlines nor whether the state has any enforcement power over certain wastes.

The Tri-Party Agreement also gave the state Ecology Department's director the power to set deadlines if an agreement could not be reached. That's the authority Ecology Director Tom Fitzsimmons is using now.

"We expect DOE to abide by the Tri-Party Agreement. ... They already made that agreement 14 years ago," said Sheryl Hutchison, Ecology Department spokes-

woman.

Officials at DOE's Washington, D.C., headquarters declined to comment Tuesday.

DOE can appeal Fitzsimmons' decision to federal court or the Washington State Pollution Control Hearings Board.

The wastes are junk laced with highly radioactive transuranic materials such as plutonium and neptunium that have long half-lives, meaning they decay very slowly.

Hanford has about 75,000 barrels of buried transuranic wastes and another 9,000 barrels stored above ground. The sticking point now is wastes from other DOE sites being shipped to Hanford.

Ultimately, DOE wants to send all of its transuranic wastes nationwide to a permanent storage site in a half-mile-deep cavern near Carlsbad, N.M.

But in the meantime, Hanford has one of the few facilities capable of checking and repacking barrels of transuranic wastes to make sure they meet the Carlsbad site's

standards. Because of that, DOE wants to send transuranic wastes from 15 small sites to Hanford for processing and storage until Carlsbad can take them.

The state and EPA are balking at that proposal because they don't know the volumes and schedules of the transuranic wastes to be routed through Hanford — in addition to no solid timetable for when Hanford's own transuranic wastes would go to New Mexico.

After three months of negotiations that were supposed to be done by March 1, the DOE balked at giving the state jurisdiction over those wastes.

That led to the state filing a lawsuit to stop DOE from sending more transuranic wastes to Hanford. Hutchison said Fitzsimmons' decision this week is linked to that lawsuit.

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# Hanford board lacking current budget figures

## ■ DOE still tallying 2003 fiscal numbers

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The lack of solid up-to-date fiscal 2003 budget figures frustrated several Hanford interests at a Tuesday Hanford Advisory Board committee meeting.

The HAB's budget committee wanted to discuss how the Department of Energy's fiscal 2003 budget figures will affect Hanford's cleanup.

But the final figures still are being crunched at DOE's Washington, D.C., headquarters. That means the HAB, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Washington's Department of Ecology cannot scrutinize the final 2003 figures to see if those numbers will keep cleanup efforts on schedules.

"The committee has a lot of concerns about the lack of budget information that is available," said its chairman, Harold Heacock, representing the Tri-City Industrial Development Council. EPA and state Ecology Department officials echoed Heacock.

In late February, Tri-City DOE officials said that the 2003 budget numbers should be sufficient to keep cleanup on schedule — with the caveat that this optimism is based on DOE's Washington, D.C., headquarters not seriously trimming Hanford's allocation of \$1.888 billion plus some extra money for the Fast Flux Test Facility and security measures.

When Congress annually appropriates money to DOE's nation-

wide cleanup efforts, those numbers tentatively include how those funds are to be divided among the sites. However, each year, DOE's headquarters pulls some money from each site to pay for some work in Washington, D.C., and it also does some last-minute money shifting among the sites.

As of Tuesday, DOE's Washington, D.C., headquarters had not completed that final tweaking, and it had not told DOE's Hanford offices what to ultimately expect for fiscal 2003.

Fiscal 2003 began 5½ months ago. Congress was tardy in appropriating DOE's money for 2003. This has been the furthest that Hanford has gone into a fiscal year without having its cleanup budget nailed down.

In a related matter, a decision on awarding a major Columbia River shore cleanup contract is hung up in Washington, D.C., the HAB committee learned.

DOE officials said the bidding among three teams now hangs on one issue, which is being pondered at DOE's Washington, D.C., headquarters. DOE Hanford officials declined to say what that issue is and when it might be resolved.

The three corporate teams submitted their bids 10 months ago in May 2002, and the contract was originally supposed to be awarded in late August 2002.

The stalled contract is a key part of how DOE plans to accelerate cleanup of contaminated soil, old reactor complexes and the 300 Area along the river shore.

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12 MAR 03

# Judge McDonald recuses self from downwinder case

■ *Federal judge steps  
down after 13 years  
on Hanford lawsuit*

**By The Associated Press**

SPOKANE — A federal judge who spent 13 years hearing a massive radiation lawsuit involving the U.S. nuclear weapons program has reluctantly stepped down from the case after plaintiffs questioned his objectivity.

U.S. District Judge Alan McDonald bowed out Monday after critics said his ownership of



**McDonald**

orchard land near the Hanford nuclear reservation damaged his ability to decide if radioactive releases from the site were

harmful to area residents.

McDonald, a semiretired judge on senior status, proclaimed his objectivity but said the issue had become a distraction in

See **Downwinder**, Page A2

# PFP cleanup well ahead of schedule

13 MAR 03  
■ *Plutonium cleanup could end months ahead of May 2004 legal deadline*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The cleanout of plutonium at Hanford's Plutonium Finishing Plant appears significantly ahead of schedule.

Department of Energy and Fluor Hanford officials declined to speculate how fast the work might be done but said the conversion of the PFP's leftover plutonium into safer forms could end months ahead of the May 2004 legal deadline.

"We are making excellent progress to break that date," said Briant Charboneau, DOE's PFP project manager.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Washington Department of Ecology officials confirmed that the plutonium conversions are going well and appear ahead of schedule.

During the Cold War, the PFP was the

final step in Hanford's plutonium-making processes, converting plutonium-laced fluids into pure plutonium pellets that looked like hockey pucks. After the PFP was shut down, it contained 4.4 tons of plutonium mixed within 19.6 tons of scrap material.

That scrap plutonium has existed as liquids, different types of powders, alloys, metal chunks and in a form similar to plastic that's called a "polycube."

Each form of leftover plutonium required a different way of converting it into a safer form for eventual shipment to a permanent storage site in New Mexico, or to Savannah River, S.C., for additional processing.

Consequently, several "stabilization" procedures have been under way at the PFP over the past few years.

About 60 percent of the 4.4 tons of leftover plutonium has been stabilized for Savannah River or packed for shipment to New Mexico, said Charboneau and George Jackson, Fluor's vice president for nuclear materials stabilization.

Originally, this plutonium stabilization

was to be completed by May 2002. But numerous plutonium handling mistakes and a chemical tank explosion in 1996 and 1997 put the project significantly behind schedule. A new deadline of mid-2005 was set. Since then, Hanford and its regulators have pushed the completion deadline up to May 2004.

Part of DOE's and Fluor's optimism on beating the May 2004 deadline is that the PFP completed stabilizing the polycubes on Feb. 28, several months ahead of schedule. Hanford created the plutonium polycubes in the 1960s as part of studying criticalities. A "criticality" is a nuclear reaction that results in a burst of radiation.

Much of the stabilization, including neutralizing the polycubes, is done in nine "muffle furnaces," which are ovens two to four times the size of a typical kitchen microwave. These furnaces are the main workhorses of the PFP, baking plutonium-laced materials into safer powders.

Meanwhile, Fluor and DOE are pondering moving the stabilized plutonium from PFP and tearing down the complex.

Hanford's plan is to send a test ship-

ment of plutonium to Savannah River in 2003 and send the rest in 2004 and 2005. But those dates might change because of coordination issues with other DOE sites and political opposition from South Carolina, Jackson and Charboneau said.

Consequently, Hanford is wondering if it needs to set up temporary on-site storage space outside of the PFP for the plutonium.

Possibilities include the old grout vaults in the 200 East Area, U Plant, a tunnel in Gable Mountain and the never-used Fuel Materials Examination Facility. DOE and Fluor probably won't decide no earlier than late April whether to tackle on-site temporary storage, Charboneau and Jackson said.

The stabilized plutonium has to be removed for the PFP because Hanford is planning to decontaminate and tear down the complex's 61 buildings by 2009. DOE and Fluor have begun exploring moving that completion date up to 2007 or 2008.

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15 MAR 2007

# Benton County agrees to spend up to \$37,500 to help save FFTF

**By Nathan Isaacs**

Herald staff writer

Benton County commissioners agreed Friday to spend up to \$37,500 to appeal a federal court ruling that would allow the Department of Energy to close Hanford's dormant test reactor.

The decision gives proponents of the Fast Flux Test Reactor additional time to build a coalition to convince the federal government to restart the reactor to produce medical isotopes.

The appeals process could take up to two years, officials said.

Along with the appeal to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, the county and FFTF proponents must get a court order extended that blocks deactivation work at the reactor. Such work could make it impossible to restart the reactor.

That court order expires at month's end.

Proponents, led by the Citizens for Medical Isotopes, believe the reactor can produce medical isotopes for treatment of cancer and other ailments. Commissioner Leo Bowman was the swing vote in the 2-1 decision. Fellow Commissioner Claude Oliver, who also is president of Citizens for Medical Isotopes, was a forgone supporter of the appeal.

Bowman said he backed extending the legal fight on behalf of cancer patients and because attorneys have told the county it has a chance in the appeal.

Commission Chairman Max Benitz Jr., however, said he voted against moving forward with the appeal because the county already had gone the "extra mile" in the legal fight.

The commission's vote set a \$37,500 limit on what it will spend on the appeal, and that money needs to be matched dollar for dollar by Citizens for Medical Isotopes. Also, the decision requires the county to drop the appeal if the courts require a liability bond, which would require the county to pay the federal government for lost work time if the county loses the appeal.

U.S. District Court Judge Ed Shea ruled in February that DOE properly followed environmental regulations when it decided to permanently shut down the experimental reactor. Ryan Brown, a deputy county prosecutor who advises the commissioners, said the county will hire the Seattle law firm of Foster Pepper & Shefelman to handle the appeal.

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# HAB backs shipping tank wastes if plan proves sound

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

Shipping some Hanford tank waste to New Mexico in the next few years sounds all right with the state and a few Hanford observers, if the Department of Energy justifies its plan scientifically and legally.

The Hanford Advisory Board's tank waste committee discussed the idea Thursday and plans to take the issue to the full board next.

Hanford has 53 million gallons of radioactive wastes in 177 tanks. DOE is building a complex to convert 25 million gallons into glass by 2028 and is studying other ways to deal with the rest by then.

One plan is to look at 1.3 million gallons of wastes in 12 tanks to see if it can be declared transuranic waste.

If that is possible, the liquids would be removed from the wastes, and the rest could be shipped to a half-mile-deep cavern near Carlsbad, N.M., which is DOE's permanent transuranic waste storage site.

DOE believes it can ship such wastes to Carlsbad before the glassification complex is fully running.

State Department of Ecology officials said the idea is good if DOE covers all legal concerns and can get the wastes into a form that the Carlsbad site can accept legally. HAB members echoed the state concerns, but also tentatively like the idea.

Classifying some tank wastes as "transuranic" can be legally and radiologically tricky. High-level radioactive tank wastes and transuranic tank wastes can be equally radioactive.

But most high-level tank wastes emit gamma particles, while transuranic tank wastes emit few or no gamma particles, one of three types of radioactive particles. Gamma particles can penetrate barriers that stop the other two.

The bottom line is that transuranic wastes need less shielding than high-level wastes.

DOE has identified 730,000 gallons of wastes in eight single-shell tanks that it believes can be easily classified as transuranic. It is also looking at another 570,000 gallons in one single-shell tank and three double-shell tanks that might be classed as transuranic.

Some HAB members were skeptical about the last four tanks, especially the three double-shell ones because the materials in them have greater chances of

being mixed with other highly radioactive wastes.

Meanwhile, the HAB committee decided it did not have enough information to recommend a position on DOE's plan to route the tanks' technetium 99 into a low-activity waste stream and avoid conventional glassification.

Technetium 99 is highly radioactive with a half-life of 210,000 years, meaning it takes 2.1 million years to decay to almost no radioactivity.

Technetium accounts for 25,000 curies of the tank wastes' 190 million curies of radioactivity.

To DOE, that represents 0.02 percent of the radioactivity. To the state, it represents a lot of radioactivity staying around for a long time.

When Hanford's glassification com-

plex is operating, it will separate tank waste into high-level wastes earmarked for certain melters, and into low-activity wastes for other melters or for some so-far-undetermined process.

DOE originally planned to put technetium in the high-level waste stream. But now, DOE believes it will save hundreds of millions of dollars by putting technetium into the low-activity waste stream, which the state opposes.

HAB members want to know more about potential costs and risks of the idea. DOE does not know yet how it will deal with technetium in the low-activity waste stream.

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# Regulators say DOE waste plans in 'disarray'

■ *Hanford managers say they are following guidelines to centralize waste disposal*

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

Hanford's regulators say the Department of Energy's waste management plans are in "disarray."

But DOE says it is following the guidance that it, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Washington's Department of Ecology informally mapped out over the past year.

The criticism and response were in a swap of letters that began Thursday, when the state Ecology Department and EPA sent a joint letter outlining the concerns to DOE's Richland office and

Office of River Protection. On Friday, the two DOE offices sent their reply.

The two sides plan to meet later this month to discuss the issue.

The state/EPA letter said recent DOE decisions could compromise environmental protections.

"We are very concerned about apparent disarray in current waste management strategies," said the letter signed by Nick Ceto, EPA's Hanford project manager, and Mike Wilson, the state's nuclear waste program manager.

Appropriate EPA and state officials could not be reached for additional comment Monday. DOE's Richland office and Office of River Protection declined to comment, saying their stances are outlined in their Friday letter.

The state/EPA letter addressed three issues:

“  
We are unclear as to what the disarray is (that) you are referring to.”

Keith Klein and Roy Schepens,  
DOE managers

■ "Spreading more waste at more disposal sites across Hanford," which the regulators said "simply does not make sense." However, the letter did not elaborate.

■ The continued use of trenches without extra protective linings to hold barrels of low-level radioactive wastes and mixed chemical and low-level wastes. DOE has said it will stop that practice after a major environmental impact study is completed

on Hanford waste disposal. But the state and EPA want the practice stopped before the study is finished.

■ Regulators' opposition to DOE's plan to route highly radioactive technetium into the low-activity waste stream at Hanford's future tank waste glassification complex instead of including it with high-level radioactive wastes. The state and EPA contend technetium is too radioactive and decays too slowly to be treated as a low-activity waste and then buried in central Hanford.

Keith Klein, DOE's Hanford manager, and Roy Schepens, manager of DOE's Office of River Protection, replied Friday that "we are unclear as to what the disarray is (that) you are referring to."

Their letter said DOE is working toward centralizing disposal of Hanford's wastes as discussed with the state and EPA a year ago.

They also wrote that DOE informally agreed a year ago to shift disposal of mixed and low-level radioactive wastes from unlined trenches to an existing huge lined landfill in central Hanford that is designed for radioactive debris. However, cost estimates and engineering studies still need to be finished, they said.

The DOE officials also maintained that treating technetium as low-activity waste would not create an environmental or health threat. They also argued concentrations of technetium are small enough that DOE can legally declare it low-activity waste, and that it is not technically practical nor cost-effective to treat technetium in the high-level waste stream.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com)

# Fluor opens the door to Mid-Columbia businesses

By Jeff St. John

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford opened the door Thursday so Mid-Columbia businesses can compete for millions of dollars of manufacturing work from the Hanford site.

"We are outsourcing site fabrication services, and it is for local businesses," said Judy Connell, Fluor Hanford director of communications.

On Thursday, the company opened a process to take requests

for information from local companies interested in doing the work. "Local" means companies must be "operating, or planning to operate, in the vicinity of the Hanford site," Connell said.

"We're soliciting interest and information from qualified firms," said Connell, who noted that the current offer doesn't yet represent a specific contract open for bid.

But Sid Morrison, chairman of the Tri-Cities Local Business Association, said a Fluor repre-

sentative had estimated the value of the kind of work being offered at between \$5 million to \$11 million a year.

"This offering is a real step in the right direction," said Morrison, a former congressman and former head of the state Department of Transportation.

His group, which includes well-known Tri-City companies and two trade councils representing more than 16,000 area workers, has been pressing Hanford con-

tractors to award more projects that "will help maintain high-quality, skilled jobs that will be here when the Department of Energy closes its doors" at the Hanford site, he said.

"It may take several small businesses to get together and form a consortium to put this together," he said. "That's all they can ask for, a chance to compete."

The work to be outsourced includes "shop-fabrication services" like welding and machining,

as well as manufacturing of prototype or "one-of-a-kind" equipment requiring engineering expertise, Connell said.

"We're looking to increase our involvement with small businesses," she said.

The solicitation for information can be viewed at the Web site [www.hanford.gov/pmm/business/rfp.htm](http://www.hanford.gov/pmm/business/rfp.htm).

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15 MAR 03

# High court clears way for pipefitters suit

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The U.S. Supreme Court declined earlier this week to hear an appeal from Fluor Federal Services in a lawsuit filed by 11 former Hanford pipefitters, attorneys for both sides said Friday.

That means the lawsuit likely will go to trial June 9 in Benton County Superior Court.

In May 2001, Superior Court Judge Carolyn Brown ruled in favor of Fluor's con-

tention that the case should go to an arbitrator. She cited a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling to back Fluor's stance.

Pipefitter attorney Jack Sheridan and the Government Accountability Project, a whistleblowers advocacy organization, appealed to the state Court of Appeals, which overturned Brown.

Fluor appealed to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which ruled the case did not have to go to arbitration nor to the

National Labor Relations Board. Then Fluor appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

On Monday, the high court declined to hear the appeal.

"We're going to have to get the case ready and go to trial with it," said Seattle attorney Randy Squires, who represents Fluor Federal and Fluor Hanford.

Tom Carpenter, a Seattle-based GAP

See **Suit**, Page B2



18 Mar 03  
■ *U.N. inspectors used  
PNNL-developed device  
to find chemical weapons*

By **Annette Cary**  
Herald staff writer

Technology developed at Richland's national laboratory to check for chemical weapons after the Gulf War has been used again in Iraq by U.N. weapons inspectors.

"The technology has come full circle," said senior scientist Aaron Diaz with Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

"The U.N. inspectors need a device that assures them of two things — speed and accuracy," explained Chip Block, vice president of MGB Ltd., a Virginia firm commercializing the equipment. "They have too much to inspect to spend undue time on any one container, and when they get a reading it had better be right."

The United Nations ordered four of the devices for weapons inspections conducted in recent months, Block said. He has received no feedback on how they've been used, but

developers said they are more accurate now than earlier models used after the Gulf War.

Though U.N. inspectors were ordered Monday to leave Iraq, Block said the device will continue to have a future in the U.S. military. The Army and Air Force have bought units.

**PNNL**  
—  
Lab wins  
technology  
award. **B6.**

The device, now called the "product acoustic signature system" or PASS, uses ultrasound waves to determine what's inside a closed container.

PASS looks like a flare gun, Diaz said, with an ultrasonic transducer on the end. Inspectors hold it up to a closed container and pull the trigger, sending sound waves into the container.

It records the time and intensity of the sound bounced back off the opposite side of the container to determine what kind of liquid is inside.

Not only does that speed up inspections, but it also saves inspectors from having to open containers and being exposed to potentially hazardous chemicals, such as those

used in chemical weapons.

PASS can look for liquids in a missile that might be used to disperse a deadly chemical, Block said. Or it could check drums of liquid to see if they contain the ingredients for chemical weapons.

Part of the renewed interest in the device comes from its improved better performance. "It is more powerful than before," Diaz said.

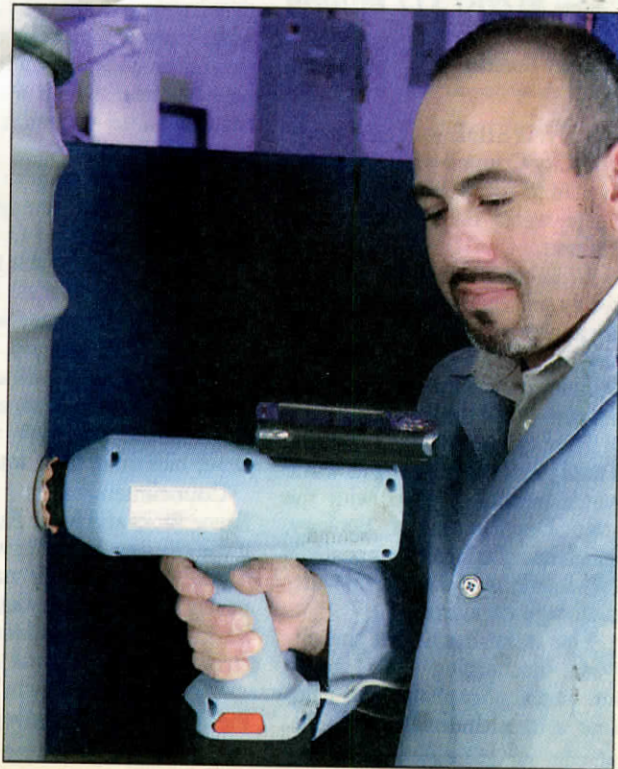
Researchers have modified it so it measures the speed of the sound waves and diminishing echoes, allowing inspectors to compare and tell the difference between similar liquids.

Since the devices were used a dozen years ago to verify munitions in Iraq after the Gulf War, they also were used in the mid-1990s to prevent contraband from crossing the borders of the former Soviet states.

The system was used to verify a U.S. and Soviet treaty to make sure chemical weapons were destroyed in the 1990s.

However, interest in the device increased dramatically after 9/11.

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Special to the Herald/Pacific Northwest National Laboratory  
Aaron Diaz, senior scientist at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, demonstrates a device that can detect chemical weapons in sealed containers. The United Nations ordered four of them for its weapon inspections in Iraq.

## Briefs

### **Benton files appeal of federal FFTF ruling**

Benton County on Wednesday filed its appeal of a federal court decision allowing the Department of Energy to continue shutting down Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility.

Supporters of restarting the former test reactor want it used to make isotopes for treating cancer. It also could be used for nuclear energy research.

DOE is prepared to start draining sodium from the reactor in November because it says the reactor has no financially feasible missions. Once sodium is drained, a restart would be difficult, if not impossible. Included in the appeal filed at the U.S. District Court in Richland is a request to continue a court order barring deactivation work from starting. That order is expected to expire at month's end.

# County wants plan for FFTF plutonium

■ *Some fear unused 'green' fuel could be used by terrorists*

By Annette Cary  
Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy needs to prepare a plan on how to keep plutonium at the Fast Flux Test Facility out of the hands of terrorists before it starts dismantling the reactor, according to Benton County.

Supporters of restarting the Hanford reactor to make medical isotopes believe the Department of Energy plans to resume the permanent shutdown of the reactor Oct. 31, a day after an injunction against the work is scheduled to be lifted.

Hanford workers had been prepared to start draining sodium from the secondary cooling loops just before work was halted because of legal action taken by the county in November. Once sodium is drained, a restart of the reactor would be far more difficult, if not impossible.

A DOE spokeswoman declined to comment on planned shutdown work on the reactor because of a suit filed by Benton County in federal court that accuses DOE of not following environmental regulations.

Federal Judge Edward Shea ruled in DOE's favor in February, but Benton County filed an appeal this week. It's trying to buy time while it looks for support to restart

the reactor.

The county also asked Shea to continue an injunction against work to dismantle the reactor while the appeal is decided.

Shea has scheduled a telephone hearing on extending the injunction for Thursday, two business days before sodium draining could begin.

Benton County argued in court papers that the injunction should be extended beyond March 30 because of the strength of its appeal and because maintaining a reactor that could make isotopes for new medicines is in the public interest.

DOE has ordered the reactor permanently shut down after Republican and Democratic administrations found no DOE use for the reactor.

Permanently shutting down the reactor would leave unused or "green" fuel made with plutonium, which could conceivably be fashioned into weapons by terrorists.

However, if it is irradiated in the reactor as was intended, it becomes spent fuel that must be remotely handled because of its high radiation fields.

"The (irradiated) assemblies are not useful to a terrorist," wrote Benton County in court documents. The spent fuel could eventually be sent to the planned nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

But the green fuel "must be guarded against terrorists in perpetuity," the county wrote in court documents.

The DOE environmental review that Benton County has attacked in its suit calls for the fuel to be sent to the Plutonium Finishing Plant, or PFP, at Hanford. But the PFP is scheduled to have its special nuclear fuels removed and be closed by the end of 2005. In fact, work on the shutdown of PFP is ahead of schedule.

At FFTF, the fuel is stored in sodium tanks sealed under steel flooring and would be difficult for terrorists to remove. If sodium is exposed to air, energy and toxic gases can be released.

"Environmentally and physically it is safer to store green fuel at FFTF than at PFP, where it will be significantly more exposed, more vulnerable to theft and use by terrorists and where it will have to be moved

when PFP closes in the near future," according to the county.

An environmental review of moving and managing the green fuel is needed, including public input and plans for disposal to another location, according to the county.

DOE declined to respond, and its brief in the case had not been filed Friday afternoon.

■ Reporter Annette Cary can be reached at 582-1533 or via e-mail at acary@tri-cityherald.com.

## FFTF gets 1 more week

■ *Benton seeks to extend injunction, block shutdown*

By Annette Cary  
Herald staff writer

Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility was given one more week Thursday before the Department of Energy can start the potentially irreversible step of draining the reactor's sodium.

Federal Judge Edward Shea prohibited the DOE from proceeding with work to permanently shut down the reactor, but said he made the move only to smooth proceedings at the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Benton County plans to ask the appeals

### FFTF restart advocates plan Monday meeting

Progress on appeals and plans to save Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility will be discussed at 7 p.m. Monday at a joint meeting of the Citizens for Medical Isotopes and the National Association of Cancer Patients.

The recent trip to Washington, D.C., by Benton County Commissioner Claude Oliver and other FFTF supporters also will be discussed. They met with Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., and the staff of Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., to advocate restarting the reactor for private production of isotopes for medicines. The meeting will be at the Ben-Franklin Title Co. building, 3315 W. Clearwater Ave., Kennewick.

court to extend the injunction blocking shutdown work at the reactor, since it got only one week's reprieve from U.S. District Court. "With one week to act, we are in crisis mode," said Claude Oliver, chairman of the Benton County Commission, speaking from Washington, D.C., where he's looking for support of a restart. "We are by no means giving up on this."

The county had asked Shea to prohibit shutdown work while the appeals court considers whether the DOE has followed environmental regulations in planning to permanently shut down the reactor.

An appeals court decision could take several months, giving proponents of restarting the reactor time to find support for commercializing operations to produce isotopes

### Bechtel Hanford cleanup contract extended again

The Department of Energy notified Bechtel Hanford on Monday that its contract has been extended to June 30.

DOE has continued Bechtel's current contract a few times to keep Columbia River shore cleanup work at Hanford going until a new team is chosen.

Bechtel's contract was supposed to expire last June. DOE still is considering three bids for the new contract.

Bechtel National and CH2M Hill lead one bidding team. Washington Group International and Fluor Corp. lead a second team. And Tetra Tech FW heads the third.

for medicine.

But Shea did not give the county a good chance of winning its appeal of the case.

He needed to see a strong likelihood of a successful appeal to extend the injunction for the months until a decision was made, but "I don't think it rises to even a probability," he said.

The week's extension is only to give the 9th Circuit more than today to consider an extension, he said, predicting that the county would next seek relief there. Without Shea's decision to extend the injunction a week from Thursday's hearing, DOE could have resumed shutdown work Monday.

DOE had asked that the county be

See FFTF, Page B2

■ *Tom Fitzsimmons says there is 'no plan, no strategy, no commitment' from D.C.*

By Jeff St. John  
Herald staff writer

The director of the state Department of Ecology blasted what he called a lack of commitment from the Department of Energy for Hanford cleanup Monday.

Tom Fitzsimmons made the comments during a speech in Pasco meant to emphasize his department's commitment to better serve the communities and industries it regulates. He spoke before a crowd of about 120 Mid-Columbia government,

agricultural and business leaders at the Red Lion Hotel.

He took a hard stance against DOE leadership in Washington, D.C., saying there is "no plan, no strategy and no commitment" to clean up thousands of barrels of transuranic waste buried in Hanford.

"We have changed our strategy from collaboration to enforcement," Fitzsimmons said.

He mentioned the state's lawsuit this month to halt shipments of transuranic wastes to Hanford until DOE comes up



Fitzsimmons

with a plan to dispose of similar wastes already there. His department has "unilaterally" demanded DOE take certain steps to "move the cleanup of buried wastes forward," he said.

DOE has argued that the state has no authority to regulate shipments of transuranic wastes, which are barrels laced with highly radioactive transuranic materials. The state has argued that DOE backed out of an agreement to include such wastes in the Tri-Party Agreement, the legal pact governing Hanford cleanup.

Fitzsimmons also questioned recent DOE proposals to treat some low-activity wastes at Hanford by methods other than glassification.

The Tri-Party Agreement calls for all 53

million gallons of radioactive wastes at Hanford to be glassified. Plans released by DOE early this year proposed treating about 26 million gallons of low-activity wastes through alternative technologies still being developed.

On a separate issue, Fitzsimmons discussed the contentious issue of Columbia River water rights, noting an ongoing scientific review that will help set state water policy for decades to come.

The goal is to bring a fresh scientific opinion to the debate over whether federal rules that have put a virtual stop to new water withdrawals from the Columbia River are doing their intended job of

See Ecology, Page B2

28 Mar 03

## ■ Agency considers smaller firms for more contracts

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy is considering awarding more work to small businesses, DOE Hanford Manager Keith Klein says.

Right now, small businesses, which he defined as companies employing up to 500 people, do about \$15 million worth of work directly for DOE. And they do 15 percent to 20 percent of the work for Hanford's prime contractors, Klein told members of the Pasco-Kennewick Rotary Club on Wednesday.



**Klein**

the \$2 billion per year in work at Hanford could increase "exponentially" over the next several years.

DOE has hinted in the past that it might seek a small business to take over dismantling the Fast Flux Test Facility, if DOE can clear litigation blocking the process.

Klein declined to comment on specifics of DOE's small-business goals or how it plans to expand the small-business portion of Hanford's work.

However, in response to a Rotarian's question, he said the small-business share of

Klein said the end of Hanford's expansion is not too far away. He said the site's budget likely will start to shrink in 2005.

Hanford employs almost 12,000 workers, without counting Pacific Northwest National Laboratory's work force.

Klein noted that two major Hanford cleanup projects, removing spent nuclear fuel from the K Basins and converting plutonium into safer forms, are scheduled to finish in 2004. That means Hanford will need less money starting in 2005.

Construction of Hanford's radioactive waste glassification complex is supposed to end by 2007, with that work force starting to shrink a couple of years earlier. And Hanford's Columbia River corridor

cleanup project is scheduled to end in 2012. The river corridor cleanup contract should be awarded within days or weeks, Klein said.

The awarding of that contract is already seven months behind schedule. DOE received bids from three teams 10 months ago. Klein declined to discuss the delay, citing procurement regulations.

By 2012, only a few thousand Hanford workers are expected to remain, according to DOE's calculations. Meanwhile, PNNL's work force is expected to increase slightly in the same period.

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29 MAR 03

## ■ *Bush mandate could affect union employees working on Columbia shore cleanup*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

A presidential order that might nullify a decades-old Hanford labor agreement is emerging as an issue in Department of Energy efforts to arrange a new contract for cleaning up along the Columbia River shore.

DOE is trying to figure out how to interpret the 2001 executive order by President Bush that apparently prohibits arrangements such as the Hanford Site Stabilization Agreement, which governs union-contractor relations at the site.

In the short term, it might affect several hundred union members working on river shore cleanup. In the long term, it might

affect all of Hanford's union employees.

Hanford labor observers fear it will open the door to the new contractor using nonunion workers and could make it difficult for contractors to forecast labor costs in their bids.

But contractor representatives say there is no push so far to tackle the work with nonunion employees.

Weapons Complex Monitor, a Washington, D.C.-based newsletter on DOE cleanup issues, reported this week that DOE's lack of clarity on the matter has delayed the contract decision. The contract originally was supposed to be awarded seven months ago.

Bechtel Hanford currently handles the work, which includes moving contaminated soil and debris to a huge central Hanford landfill and demolishing and sealing old reactor complexes.

As part of efforts to speed up nuclear cleanup nationwide, DOE decided to put

the river shore work on a fast track, finishing most of it by 2012.

DOE is splitting the acceleration into two phases, with its timetables not yet announced. The second phase is supposed to end in 2012.

Three corporate teams submitted bids for the first phase last May. DOE was supposed to name the winner by late August.

DOE officials in Washington, D.C., and Richland could not be reached for comment Friday on the Weapons Complex Monitor's report.

Washington Group International and Fluor Corp. lead one bidding team, Bechtel National and CH2M Hill the second team and Foster Wheeler Environmental Co. the third. Tetra Tech Inc. of Pasadena recently bought Foster Wheeler Environmental and created Tetra Tech FW Inc. No information was available Friday on whether that might affect Foster Wheeler's bid.

Bechtel Hanford's contract was due to expire last summer. Since then, it has been extended three times. The latest extension ends next week, but DOE informally has told Bechtel to expect another extension.

Relations between Hanford's unions and the site's ever-changing lineup of contractors has been governed by the Hanford Site Stabilization Agreement since 1976. The pact sets some universal wages and benefits parameters across Hanford in return for the unions' promise not to strike.

The agreement was designed to stabilize wages and working conditions at a site that sees regular turnover in contractors, a fluctuating blue-collar work force and the routine shifting of people and jobs from company to company.

It also smoothed out disputes between contractors and unions, leading to a

See **Order**, Page A2

3 APR 03

## ■ *Most of radioactive waste removed from Tank C-106*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Hanford pumped most of the remaining fluids out of Tank C-106 on Tuesday as the first step in the push to permanently "close" a radioactive waste tank.

The Department of Energy and the state have not negotiated a definition, or conditions, of what "closing" a tank means. However, an obvious step will include removing almost all, or all, of the

wastes from inside a tank, Hanford officials said.

DOE wants to close 26 to 40 single-shell tanks by late 2006. However, the environmental impact studies, public comment periods and the formal closure definitions probably won't be completed until late 2004.

Tank C-106 has been designated the first tank to be closed. This tank used to be one of Hanford's most troublesome because its wastes kept spontaneously heating up. That required the routine addition of water to cool it, which in turn increased the volume of the waste in C-106. But most of those wastes had been pumped out. And DOE and CH2M Hill

Hanford Group moved most of the remaining 18,000 gallons of liquids Monday to the safer double-shell Tank AY-102, leaving about 10,000 gallons of thick radioactive sludge, said Jim Thompson, DOE's Office of River Protection's manager for single-shell tank construction, and Ryan Dodd, CH2M Hill's closure project manager.

DOE and CH2M Hill plan to add diluted oxalic acid to dissolve the remaining sludge in mid-September and pump the resulting fluids to double-shell Tank AN-106 in late September, they said. The dissolved sludges are going to a different tank because their chemical makeup is different from the liquids sent

to Tank AY-102.

Between now and mid-September, CH2M Hill will install a transfer line between tanks C-106 and AN-106 and put a new exhaust system into C-106.

Meanwhile, CH2M Hill will also install equipment to pump liquids and sludges out of two more single-shell tanks in 2003.

Tank S-112 is supposed to have all wastes removed by Sept. 30, and Tank S-102's wastes are supposed to be removed by Dec. 31.

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3 APR 03

# Loud noise was just a magnet at PNNL

**By the Herald staff**

The sudden shutdown of a superconducting magnet at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland created such a loud noise that emergency crews were called Tuesday night.

The superconducting magnet has a current continually running through it, but Tuesday it unexpectedly quenched, or shut down, said PNNL spokeswoman Staci Maloof.

Energy stored within the magnet was transferred to the liquid helium surrounding it. A safety valve released, allowing helium to dissipate harmlessly as a gas into the air, Maloof explained.

A staff member heard the pop — like the sound of a tire being punctured, but louder and longer — and reported it.

“There was no danger to people or equipment,” Maloof said.

The superconducting magnet was not supposed to quench, but safety features worked as planned, she said. The cause is still not known.

The magnet is part of a mass spectrometer that’s among the most advanced systems of its type in the world.

It is used at PNNL’s Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory, or EMSL, for several projects. They include studying proteins in plague bacteria for a homeland security project, studying organisms that consume hazardous materials for an environmental project and comparing proteins in cancerous and normal cells to better understand the illness.

APR 03

## Benton works to file FFTF injunction request

Benton County was working on filing a request Monday with the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals asking that the Department of Energy be barred from proceeding with work to permanently shut down Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility.

It could not be confirmed whether the motion was filed late Monday.

However, the appeals court did agree to temporarily bar work until judges have a chance to hear Benton County's argument, said County Commissioner Claude Oliver. Under a ruling last week in U.S. District Court, DOE may resume work, including draining sodium from secondary cooling loops of the reactor, as soon as 5 p.m. Thursday. Once the sodium is drained, restarting the reactor would be difficult, if not impossible.

Benton County wants to block shutdown work until the appeals court makes a decision on a county lawsuit that claims DOE did not follow environmental regulations required for a permanent shutdown.



## **Environmental groups to sue DOE over wastes**

Several Northwest environmental groups are expected to file a lawsuit in federal court today to stop the Department of Energy from sending transuranic wastes to Hanford.

Heart of America Northwest, Columbia Riverkeeper, two Sierra Club chapters and the Washington chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility are expected to file the suit.

It would be similar to a lawsuit that Washington state filed against DOE in federal court March 4. That lawsuit seeks to block a DOE plan to ship transuranic wastes to Hanford from various small DOE sites across the nation.

Under the DOE plan, the wastes would go to a Hanford facility that could check and repack those wastes. The wastes eventually would be trucked to a permanent underground storage site near Carlsbad, N.M.

## ■ DOE fined \$76,900 for failing to remove K East Basin sludge

By Les Blumenthal and Annette Cary

Herald staff writers

WASHINGTON — The Department of Energy was fined \$76,900 by the federal Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday for failing to start removing sludge from the K East Basin at Hanford.

Removal of the nearly 50 cubic meters of sludge was supposed begin by Dec. 31 under deadlines imposed by the Tri-Party Agreement. EPA called the sludge highly radioactive and said its removal was one of its top priorities.

Under the Tri-Party agreement, if DOE missed the deadline it faced \$5,000 in penalties for the first week of delay and up to \$10,000 for each additional week.

The requirement to remove the sludge has been part of the agreement for more than a decade, EPA said in a news release.

The sludge has been contaminated by spent nuclear fuel in containers that have corroded in the pool of water. Part of the push to remove it is the propensity of the K East Basin to leak. It is not leaking now, but has leaked twice since the late 1980s.

"The EPA is pleased with the Department of Energy's progress in removing the spent nuclear fuel from the two K Basins," said EPA regional administrator John Iani in Seattle. He added more than half the fuel already has been removed for storage elsewhere on the nuclear reservation.

But Iani said the sludge still needs to go.

"Starting and completing this activity on schedule is an important part of reducing risks at the Hanford site," he said.

Nick Ceto, EPA's Hanford Site Manager, echoed the sentiment. "We're happy with what they've done with the fuel, but the sludge is important, too," he said.

The first of the sludge is expected to be removed in May, said DOE spokeswoman Colleen Clark.

Tri-Party Agreement milestones call for all the sludge to be removed by Aug. 31, 2004.

"We have been late to start, but we will be early to finish," she said.

DOE expects to remove the last of the sludge by Jan. 31, 2004 — seven months early.

"It's a very complicated process that takes a lot of choreography," Clark said. "We have taken a deliberate pace to ensure the safety of workers and the basin environment."

DOE told EPA there would be a delay in starting sludge removal

See **Sludge**, Page B2

4 APR 03

# Fluor set to start FFTF shutdown

■ *Contractor waiting for DOE notice to proceed after injunction to halt work ends*

By Annette Cary

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy is free to begin draining sodium from Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility.

That work, which would effectively end the reactor's useful life, is expected to begin in the next few days.

Thursday afternoon, two judges for the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals refused to extend an injunction prohibiting DOE from continuing work to permanently shut down the reactor. The injunction expired at 5 p.m. Thursday.

"I don't know if they knew they were sentencing (the reactor) to death," said

Benton County Commissioner Claude Oliver, who has led the fight to save the reactor. "The scenario before us tonight is lose-lose."

Once sodium is drained from the reactor, a restart would be difficult, if not impossible.

The schedule for draining sodium is now up to the contractor, Fluor Hanford, said DOE spokeswoman Colleen Clark.

Once Fluor Hanford gets written

notice from DOE that it may proceed with shutdown work, the contractor expects to begin work soon.

"I'd say less than a week ... a matter of days," said Fluor Hanford spokesman Michael Turner. The draining of the sodium from the reactor's secondary cooling loops was to begin in November, but Benton County filed a last-minute suit to halt the action.

It wanted to buy time to win support

for a plan to operate the reactor privately to make isotopes for medicine and perform research, including testing to support development of the next generation of nuclear power plants.

But federal judge Edward Shea ruled the county did not make its case that DOE had not followed environmental regulations required to start permanent

See **FFTF**, Page A2

4 APR 03  
■ *Advisory board wants technetium to remain as high-level radioactive waste*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

SPOKANE — The Hanford Advisory Board is taking the state's side in the debate over what to do with the technetium in Hanford's radioactive tank wastes.

The board plans to approve a memo today to the Department of Energy that questions the federal agency's decision to

deal with the tank wastes' technetium as a low-activity waste.

The board wants the technetium to remain classified as a high-level radioactive waste and wants DOE to provide it with data that explains the agency's decision to treat technetium as a low-activity waste.

Technetium is highly radioactive with an extremely long half life, taking a couple of million years to decay. And it moves faster than most radioactive substances through ground water.

And technetium accounts for about 25,000 curies of the 190 million curies of radioactivity in Hanford's 53 million gal-

lons of tank wastes, significantly less than 1 percent. DOE contends that low percentage means this technetium can be considered a low-activity waste.

Hanford's master plan is to separate the 53 million gallons into high-level and low-activity wastes, glassifying the high-level wastes and either glassifying or otherwise treating the rest.

For several years, DOE has pondered how technetium can be classified. DOE kept classifying technetium as high-level because it thought a cost-effective way could be found to deal with it. That cheaper way has not been found, DOE officials said.

It is expected to cost \$40 million to install technetium removal equipment and hundreds of millions of dollars to operate it through 2028 because only extremely expensive filtering resins can be used, DOE officials said. And those resins must be replaced after being used one or two times.

The board's draft memo said DOE has not shown the public enough information to justify classifying the tanks' technetium as a low-activity waste.

"In fact, at this time, it appears the adverse effects (of classifying technetium as a low-activity waste) may outweigh the benefits," the board's memo said.

Right now, the state's best weapon in this debate appears to be Washington's Department of Health.

DOE's application for the glassification complex's air emissions permit is before the state health department, and DOE's application still has technetium classified as a high-level waste, said Al Conklin, state health department official. If DOE wants to classify technetium as a low-activity waste, it will have to revise that application and get the health department's approval.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).

3 APR 03

## ■ *Groups looking to keep Hanford from accepting wastes from other DOE sites*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Several environmental groups filed a federal lawsuit Wednesday hoping to keep Hanford from accepting transuranic wastes from other Department of Energy sites.

Heart of America Northwest, Columbia Riverkeeper, the Sierra Club and Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility

filed the suit in U.S. District Court in Portland. DOE said Wednesday that it hadn't yet seen a copy of the filing.

"These shipment are like 'dirty bombs' of plutonium waste being trucked through our communities," said Gerald Pollet, director of Heart of America Northwest, referring to a potential terrorist tactic of packing radioactive materials into a conventional bomb.

Transuranic wastes are shipped on specialized flatbed trucks in barrels tucked inside big reinforced steel containers.

"Our members will be stuck in traffic beside these shipments," Pollet said.

DOE spokeswoman Colleen Clark said the shipments meet all federal and state transportation standards, are subject to inspection by each state on their routes and are stored at Hanford in compliance with all state and federal permits and regulations.

So far, Hanford has received five such shipments.

The suit follows a similar filing by Washington state against DOE on March 4 in U.S. District Court in Spokane.

Both cases revolve around DOE's plans to ship barrels of transuranic wastes from small DOE sites nationwide to Hanford to be checked, repacked and stored tem-

porarily pending shipment to permanent underground storage near Carlsbad, N.M.

Transuranic wastes are junk in barrels that includes highly radioactive substances that take thousands to millions of years to lose their radioactivity. DOE's master plan is to send all of its transuranic wastes to Carlsbad, which has strict requirements.

Hanford already has a facility capable of checking and repacking barrels of transuranic wastes to meet those standards. Consequently, DOE wants to ship transuranic wastes from its small sites,

See **Transuranic**, Page B2

## Appeals court to rule today on FFTF future

Benton County officials were waiting late Wednesday afternoon to see if the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals will consider today whether to extend an injunction prohibiting shutting down Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility.

The injunction is set to end at 5 p.m. today. Without an injunction, the Department of Energy may begin draining sodium from the reactor. After sodium is drained, restarting the reactor would be difficult, if not impossible.

The DOE is asking that the county be required to post a bond of \$3 million per month to cover its costs if the injunction is extended.

Benton County is arguing against the bond and asking that work be halted while the appeals court hears its case that DOE did not follow correct environmental procedures for the shutdown.

Also this week, the Franklin County Republican Central Committee donated \$500 toward efforts to keep the reactor operable.

# FFTF's fate could be known today

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy wants Benton County to pay \$3 million for each month work is delayed to permanently shut down Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility.

Federal Judge Ed Shea will consider at 8 a.m. today whether work to permanently shut down the reactor, including draining sodium, may resume as soon as Monday.

The arguments will be made by telephone because of scheduling problems, but people who want to listen can hear proceedings at the courtroom in the Federal Building in Richland.

Benton County has filed an appeal to a Feb. 25 federal court decision that would allow shutdown work to continue. Until the appeal is decided in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, the county wants Shea to extend an injunction prohibiting shutdown work.

But if the injunction is continued past its Monday expiration, DOE wants Benton County to post a \$9 million bond to pay for the costs of maintaining the reactor in operable condition for the estimated three months the case could be on appeal. Should an appeals court decision take longer, DOE is prepared to ask for \$3 million more for each additional month.

If Benton County loses the appeal, under the bond requirement it would owe DOE the maintenance costs. But county commissioners already have said they would drop the appeal rather than file a bond.

Benton County asked that no bond be required because maintaining the reactor for medical use is in the public interest. The county filed the appeal to give supporters more time to develop a plan to operate the reactor privately to make isotopes for new medical treatments.

Once sodium is drained from the reactor, restarting FFTF would be difficult, if not impossible.

But DOE said spending \$36 million a year to keep the reactor ready for a restart is not in the public interest. That money "is better spent on other DOE programs, including Hanford cleanup," DOE wrote in court documents.

DOE has looked for a use for the reactor since 1994 but says it has not been able to find a feasible project.

The county's argument that FFTF could be used to make medical isotopes "amounts to no more than wishful speculation," according to DOE.

DOE also argued in court documents that Benton County has little chance of winning an appeal.

However, DOE amended a contract with Fluor Hanford last week after the county argued that it overstepped the work that was allowed by environmental studies. The county wants shutdown work to be stopped until more environmental study is

5 APR. 03

# FFTF draining to start Monday

## ■ Removing sodium start of permanent reactor shutdown

By Annette Cary

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford plans to begin draining sodium from the secondary cooling loop of the Fast Flux Test Facility on Monday, effectively ending its useful life.

The work was scheduled after the Department of Energy notified Fluor to proceed with work to permanently shut down the Hanford reactor Friday.

The reactor has been kept on standby at a cost of about \$36 million a year since 1992, as government and private groups have investigated uses for the reactor. The nuclear fuel was removed from the core, but the sodium cooling system has been maintained to permit a possible restart.

But this week, supporters of a restart ran out of options.

The government rejected proposals to use it to produce tritium to boost the power of bombs, to make isotopes used on flights deep into space and to produce isotopes for new cancer treatments.

Democratic and Republican administrations concluded that no plan proposed was financially feasible or assigned the work to other reactors.

Benton County saved the reactor for a few more months in November, filing suit in federal court on the last business day before sodium was to be drained.

But the county ran out of promising legal maneuvers Thursday, when the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals refused to extend a ban on shutdown work at the reactor while it considered whether DOE followed environmental regulations.

“Effective immediately, DOE Richland and site contractor management are hereby authorized to continue with all appropriate decontamination activities

associated with the permanent shutdown of the FFTF,” wrote Jessie Hill Roberson, DOE assistant secretary, Friday in a memo to Keith Klein, DOE’s Hanford manager.

DOE’s Richland office then sent notice to Fluor.

Fluor already has started shutting down systems that had remained in use for the past decade. But no work has been done that could not be reversed at some cost if the reactor were to be restarted.

However, sodium needs to remain in two loops of pipes to ensure their stainless steel remains flawless. Once it is drained, a restart is unlikely if not impossible.

When the reactor was operating, the primary loop of liquid sodium was used to carry heat away from the experimental reactor’s core to a separate secondary loop that worked much like a radiator, dumping hot air from the cooling towers into the atmosphere.

The sodium that Fluor plans to start draining Monday from the secondary cooling loop is not radioactive.

Benton County wanted to save the reactor primarily to make medicines for isotopes. But it also could play a role in testing required to develop a program to prevent nuclear proliferation and the next generation of nuclear power reactors. The county had proposed commercial use of the reactor.

FFTF has been called DOE’s newest, largest and most versatile reactor. It was designed to research advance forms of nuclear fuel for breeder reactors, but the nation scrapped plans for those reactors because of nuclear proliferation concerns.

Replacing the reactor and its Fuels and Materials Examination Facility would cost \$2.5 billion, according to DOE.

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7 APR 03

# ■ DOE's plans to build 2 melters to clean up tank wastes 'shocking' to officials

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

SPOKANE — A new wrinkle emerged last week in the debate whether Hanford should build two or three melters to deal with the site's low-activity radioactive tank wastes.

The Department of Energy plans to build two low-activity melters in the tank waste glassification complex under construction in central Hanford. The state and the Hanford Advisory Board long have argued for three low-activity waste melters.

On Thursday, Joy Turner, the state

Department of Ecology's tank treatment policy and communications manager, briefed the HAB in Spokane about a March 31 meeting between DOE and the state on several tank waste glassification matters.

On March 31, DOE told the state that contractor Bechtel National has determined that building a third low-activity waste melter "is a waste of effort," Turner said.

Bechtel figured that not enough low-activity wastes can be sent through the glassification complex at the same time to keep three melters working full time. The third melter would have to crank up and power down periodically because it would not be working at full speed all the time, Hanford officials said.

The fluctuation would greatly increase

wear and tear on the third melter.

Turner said that revelation "was shocking" to state officials, who heard about it for the first time March 31.

HAB member Doug Huston, representing Oregon, said: "The decision was sprung on everybody without a public process, and that isn't right."

On Friday, Greg Jones, executive officer for DOE's Office of River Protection, said the federal agency hopes to avoid surprising Hanford's regulators in the future.

He said Bechtel's conclusion regarding the third low-activity waste melter "was a surprise to me" when that was announced.

### Also on Friday, the HAB:

■ Told DOE that it wants to see work on fix-it measures sped up for the highly con-

taminated 618-10 and 618-11 burial sites in southeastern Hanford. That request was part of a memo generally supporting ground water cleanup measures.

The two sites contain materials that are so radioactive they can be removed only with remote-controlled equipment, which has not been developed. Consequently, cleanup of the 618-10 and 618-11 sites usually gets slotted in "to-be-dealt-with-later" portions of Hanford's cleanup plans.

■ Learned that Bechtel National's streak of 8.8 million hours worked without a lost-time accident on the construction of the glassification complex ended this week when a worker suffered a broken leg.

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# FFTF 8 APR 03

## sodium draining begins

■ *Restart still possible for a short time, but drainage seen as end*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The valves were flipped at 8:42 a.m.

By 10 a.m. Monday, 16,600 gallons of hot liquid sodium had drained out of a secondary cooling loop of Hanford's dormant Fast Flux Test Facility to begin permanently shutting down the controversial experimental reactor.

From a purely engineering viewpoint, it is possible for an undetermined, but limited, time to revive the reactor.

But symbolically, emotionally, politically, legally and practically — FFTF's euthanization began Monday with no one expecting it to stop.

"It's one of the most gut-wrenching experiences I can imagine on so many levels," said Wanda Munn of Richland, a retired engineer who spent almost 20 years working at FFTF and worked hard for several more years trying to revive it.

# Critics question Hanford budget

■ '03 figures unveiled  
to criticism DOE  
sharing few details

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

SPOKANE — Hanford's fiscal 2003 budget picture became a little clearer Thursday, but a wide range of critics argue that lots of details are still missing.

The Department of Energy's Richland office publicly unveiled its final fiscal 2003 budget figures at a Hanford Advisory Board meeting in Spokane — six months into the fiscal year that began Oct. 1, 2002.

The bottom line: DOE's Richland office is seeing a budget increase of \$39 million from fiscal 2002 to fiscal 2003.

Hanford's 2002 budget was \$789 million for cleanup, maintaining the Fast Flux Test Facility and security measures. DOE's target Hanford budget for cleanup, the FFTF and security in 2003 totaled \$851 million.

But after DOE juggled its overall budget and final congressional instructions in the past few weeks, the Richland office's 2003 budget has ended up at \$828 million for cleanup, the FFTF and security. The Richland office has not yet figured out how the final \$828 million will be split among the site's programs.

These figures do not include DOE's Office of River Protection's budget to deal with Hanford's tank wastes. The Office of River Protection has been earmarked a \$48 million budget increase from \$1.079 billion in 2002 to a supposed \$1.127 billion in 2003.

But the Office of River Protection won't unveil its final 2003 figures — after congressional

10 APR 03  
■ *DOE says state has no right to set cleanup deadlines for Hanford*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy sued Washington's Department of Ecology on Wednesday, contending the state does not have the right to unilaterally set deadlines for cleanup of transuranic wastes at Hanford.

Federal attorneys filed lawsuits in U.S. District Court and Benton County Superior Court.

The federal agency wants to nullify recent decisions by Tom Fitzsimmons, the Ecology Department's director, for regulating the wastes.

The agency views his decision, plus an earlier state lawsuit, as hindering federal plans to speed up nuclear cleanup at Hanford.

Transuranic wastes are junk laced with highly radioactive materials such as plutonium and neptunium. Hanford has about 75,000 barrels of buried transuranic wastes and another 9,000 barrels stored above ground.

The state claims the Tri-Party Agreement — the legal pact governing Hanford's cleanup — says the Energy Department and its regulators must negotiate a deadline to finish excavating, treating and shipping the wastes.

DOE contends the state has no authority over those wastes.

On March 11, Fitzsimmons declared DOE must have treatment and storage facilities in place at Hanford by June 2012. And he said DOE must submit by Aug. 31 a detailed plan and schedule to meet that goal.

Fitzsimmons cited part of the Tri-Party Agreement that gives the Ecology Department's director the final say in any deadlocked dispute between DOE and its regulators. However, the agreement also gives DOE the right to appeal.

The state expected DOE to appeal.

DOE's cleanup czar Jessie Roberson said in a news release Wednesday: "Recent actions by the state of Washington could have a chilling effect on cleanup operations at Hanford and elsewhere. (DOE) has fundamentally changed the cleanup programs for every site in the country. Our balanced and integrated cleanup approach is making progress."

## ■ Nevada's program criticized in Inspector General report

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

A Hanford program to sell excess equipment is being touted as a solution for a similar, highly criticized program in Nevada.

A federal Inspector General's report slammed the Department of Energy's Nevada Test Site for selling items at ultra-cheap prices through a local economic development middleman.

The site sold 23 trucks for 17 cents each and a \$9,000 copier for 5 cents, the report said.

The Nevada Test Site and Hanford have

similar programs in which excess equipment is first offered to other DOE sites and federal agencies, then handed over to a local economic development middleman. The "community reuse organization" then sells the items.

The idea is if federal agencies can no longer use the equipment, it will be sold to boost efforts to counteract shrinking federal work forces at DOE sites.

But Nevada officials did not attempt to calculate the fair market value of sold items, the report said.

For example, the Nevada middleman group bought a drilling rig from DOE for \$50,000, fixed it up and sold it to a broker

for \$248,000. The broker then sold the rig to a Texas company for \$3.9 million.

The report also found the Nevada site had other problems, including failing to determine if the local economy was helped by the sales.

In another incident, Nevada Test Site sold off lab equipment that DOE's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory had asked for, a misstep that cost DOE \$2.5 million.

The Inspector General's office based its recommendations to Nevada officials on Hanford's program, said Steve Wisness, DOE's director of site services at Hanford, and Ryan Kilbury, DOE's property

See **Hanford**, Page B5

12 APR 03

## ■ Money-shifting concept's demise upsets state Ecology

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

It has been informally called "Al Alm's 2006 plan."

And it's been around since 1996.

The idea was that the Department of Energy could keep cleanup budgets level from year to year from 1996 and put extra efforts into finishing cleanup at small sites such as Rocky Flats, Colo., and Fernald, Ohio, by 2006.

After that, when all the small sites are supposedly cleaned up, their normal money allocations would go to the big sites such as Hanford to speed up those cleanup efforts.

This concept has influenced Hanford

politics for at least six years.

Now, that plan is no more.

When DOE finishes cleanup work at Rocky Flats and Fernald, it won't shift future saved money to Hanford and other majors sites. Instead, DOE's overall nuclear cleanup budget will just get smaller after 2006.

"It's just another thing that (DOE) promised that never came to pass," said Mike Wilson, nuclear programs manager for Washington's Department of Ecology.

Nick Ceto, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Hanford site manager, said the EPA's chief concern is whether Hanford gets enough money to meet its obligations, not where that money comes from.

Wilson learned of the money-shifting concept's demise in late March at a cleanup conference in Denver, where

Roger Butler, budget chief for DOE's nationwide cleanup programs, talked about it.

In a phone interview this week, Butler said DOE has been incrementally increasing Hanford's and DOE's nationwide cleanup budgets to put another acceleration cleanup plan — unveiled in 2002 — into action. The 1996 plan called for level funding, he said.

"This is certainly not DOE renegeing" on a promise, Butler said.

DOE's nationwide cleanup budget is expected to peak in 2005, then drop to somewhere between \$5 billion and \$6 billion by 2008, Butler said. Much of that decrease will come from DOE not shifting money from small sites to big sites, he said.

The predicted 2008 budget would be less than the roughly \$6 billion annual nationwide cleanup budgets of the late

1990s. Those late 1990s budgets also did not include Hanford's current annual glassification plant costs of \$690 million. Right now, DOE is seeking slightly more than \$7 billion for 2004.

DOE is touting Rocky Flats and Fernald as high profile examples of major cleanup projects to be done by 2006.

Actually, over the past several years, DOE has waffled between completion dates of 2006 and 2010 for both sites. In early 2002, DOE zeroed in again on 2006. Numerous mixed signals have emerged in the past year over whether those two sites will make the 2006 deadline.

The original acceleration plan came in 1996, the brainchild of Al Alm, DOE's cleanup czar from 1996 to 1998. Back then, DOE struggled with getting adequate money each year from Congress to

See **Axed**, Page B2

12 APR. 03

# PNNL advancing chemical testing

## ■ Chamber could aid detection of weapons of mass destruction

By Annette Cary  
Herald staff writer

Weapons inspectors could get help identifying factories being secretly used to make nuclear or chemical weapons from two slippery Teflon rooms in the basement of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland.

The laboratory is close to opening a new state-of-the-art chemical research chamber useful for measuring and studying sticky chemicals that can be released into the air in very small quantities when weapons of mass destruction are produced.

While that was the impetus to build the chamber, researchers said its uses go beyond studies to protect against weapons of mass destruction.

It could help ensure that the apple you buy in the spring still is as crisp as it was when it was picked in the fall. Or it could make sure that the air circulated through the engine on a cross-country flight is not harmful to your health. Pesticide manufacturers could accurately predict how much of a chemical you might be exposed to if you walk through your garden on a sunny day 24 hours after you sprayed.

"There are other testing chambers," said senior research scientist Kathy Probasco. "This one is different because it is for very complex sticky materials

that are very hard to analyze."

The walls of the chamber's two rooms are hung with what looks like sheets of plastic wrap held with duct tape, but it's actually clear sheets of Teflon held with Teflon tape. Researchers don't want substances they're analyzing in the chamber to stick to the walls.

For tests, the chamber can be sealed and filled with ultraclean air — air without the moisture, hydrocarbons, exhaust gases, human metabolites and other contaminants.

Then researchers can create the environment they want. Black lights can be turned on, reflected against the chamber's silver walls, to simulate sunlight. Researchers



Herald/Molly Van Wagner  
Pacific Northwest National Laboratory senior research scientists Kathy Probasco, David Maughan and Jerome Birnbaum, from left, are close to opening a chemical testing chamber that can be used to study harmful chemicals in the air, including car emissions and pesticides.

See **Testing**, Page B2

## Bioinformatics director appointed at PNNL

11 APR. 03

George Michaels, an internationally recognized pioneer in bioinformatics, has been named director of bioinformatics at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland.

The study of the genome and the proteins that control cell functions have led to an explosion of biological information and the need for biology to transform from a purely lab-based science to



**Michaels**

an information science as well. Bioinformatics develops the tools and databases needed to understand biological processes by allowing large amounts of complex data to be analyzed and interpreted.

Michaels will lead the growing portfolio of bioinformatics and computational biology research activities at the Department of Energy lab.

He worked most recently at Monsanto in St. Louis, where he designed an integrated expression profiling program. He also was vice president and chief scientist of Genome Dynamics, a Maryland biotechnology startup company.



# ■ *Experiment looks at bulk vitrification to glassify tank wastes*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Hanford has glassified its first radioactive tank wastes during an experiment to study disposal methods besides conventional vitrification.

Now, scientists and engineers are preparing to study the 6 cubic inches of glassified waste — created Friday in a test chamber about the size of a pizza oven — to see how it compares with radioactive wastes neutralized by conventional glassification.

The process is called bulk vitrification and is one of three methods being studied for possible use on some of Hanford's 53 million gallons of radioactive tank wastes.

The wastes, which are held in 177 underground tanks, will eventually be divided into 42 million gallons of low-activity wastes and 11 million gallons of high-level wastes.

17 APR 03

## ■ Hanford hopes to move cesium, strontium capsules 2 years ahead of schedule

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

Hanford is cranking up efforts to remove 1,930 highly radioactive cesium and strontium capsules from indoor pools to a yet-to-be-picked dry storage area.

The Department of Energy and Fluor Hanford want to finish that transfer by Sept. 30, 2006 — two years ahead of schedule.

DOE recently approved the accelerated project, with Fluor expecting to begin moving capsules by April 1, 2005.

“We’re going to be pressed to meet that

schedule,” said Dale McKenney, Fluor’s manager for the capsules.

The capsules are stored in indoor pools in an auxiliary building semi-attached to Hanford’s closed B Plant in the 200 East Area.

That collection of water-filled pools is probably the densest concentration of radioactivity at Hanford, holding 120 million curies.

By comparison, Hanford’s 53 million gallons of tank wastes, scattered across the entire 200 Area in underground tanks, contain about 190 million curies of radioactivity.

In the late 1970s and early ’80s, Hanford removed some highly radioactive strontium and cesium from the tank wastes, and shipped 700, 22-inch-long capsules of the wastes all over the nation

for medical purposes. But one capsule leaked in 1990, and all 700 were recalled to Hanford by 1995.

The recalled capsules, plus those that never left Hanford, total 1,930 containers.

These are stored in pools because the water acts as a radiation shield, while also cooling the hot cesium and strontium. DOE originally planned to glassify the wastes sometime after 2012 in the tank waste vitrification complex under construction in central Hanford.

But the cesium and strontium will decay to benign levels in just a few hundred years, much fewer than the required 10,000-year lifespan of Hanford’s future waste-holding glass.

Now, DOE is thinking about putting the capsules inside of slightly bigger can-

isters and storing them aboveground in a dry area. That is to remove the risk of the indoor pools’ springing leaks with contaminated water seeping into the ground.

DOE hopes a way can be found to send the repackaged capsules to a proposed permanent storage site inside Yucca Mountain, Nev., without expensive, complicated treatments.

How the capsules will be removed from the pools and where at Hanford they will be stored is unknown. The project’s bidders will submit plans on how to tackle this, McKenney said.

A request for bids will likely go out in late May or June, with the contract likely to be awarded in late August.

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18 APA 03

# Hanford alerts inconsistent, counties say

## ■ Dispatchers not always notified for similar alarms

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

A pressure problem with a canister of spent nuclear fuel led Hanford to alert Benton County's emergency services department.

But two Feb. 5 orders for up to 800 employees to seek cover from possible airborne contaminants were not enough to trigger Hanford to alert emergency dispatchers in Benton, Franklin and Grant counties.

That inconsistency bothers emergency officials in the three counties.

The three counties' emergency services departments sent letters to the Department of Energy on March 17 and March 27 to complain about Hanford issuing take-cover orders to site employees without alerting local agencies about possible radioactive airborne releases on the site.

A take-cover order is standard Hanford procedure in which workers are told to go indoors to avoid possible airborne radioactive and chemical emissions.

On Feb. 5, mistakes in inspecting air monitors in the enclosed, highly radioactive K East Basin triggered an alarm at 11:55 a.m. Mixed signals about possible radioactive emissions caused the K East Basin to be evacuated before the monitor problem was found.

Another mistake triggered two alarms at 1:55 p.m., followed by a 2 p.m. call to the Hanford Fire Department for self-contained breathing equipment. The take-cover order for the K East Basin area came at 2:35 p.m.

Then another 2:56 p.m. take-cover order covered almost 800 people in the entire K and N reactors areas. DOE called a formal alert at 3:24 p.m. Hanford notified Benton County at 3:34 p.m.

That's three hours and 39 minutes after an alarm triggered the K East evacuation, and 94 minutes after a call went for self-contained breathing equipment. Plus that's 59 minutes

after the first take-cover order and 38 minutes after the second take-cover order.

Hanford is supposed to start alerting local emergency services 15 minutes after an alert is formally called.

Benton County Emergency Services' letter, signed by its board chairman Max Benitz Jr., contended that the criteria to begin alerting local emergency dispatchers kicked in three times on Feb. 5 — at 2 p.m., at 2:35 p.m. and at 2:56 p.m.

But DOE sent an April 9 letter to Benitz that said the call for self-contained breathing equipment and the two take-cover orders were not in Hanford's criteria to alert Mid-Columbia emergency dispatchers.

"That's unacceptable," Benitz said.

DOE's letter stated that Hanford gave local emergency services "33 abnormal event notifications" in 2001 and 2002. The letter had no information on how long it took Hanford to notify local agencies about those incidents.

# Tank waste vapor reports down

By the Herald staff

A January-February spike of reports of smelling radioactive waste tank vapors at Hanford has dropped to zero in March and April.

CH2M Hill Hanford Group recorded eight people reporting smelling vapors in January and February at Hanford's tank farms, a significant increase since 20 reports were tallied in all of 2002, said Susan Eberlein, CH2M Hill's vice president for environmental safety, health and quality Tuesday.

All eight people were checked

out with no symptoms found specifically tied to tank vapors, Eberlein said. There were some cases of people with symptoms that could be due to either vapors or a simultaneous normal illness, she said.

Anyone smelling vapors at the tank farms is entitled to receive medical checks, she added. The vapors were either of ammonia or of organic chemicals coming from wastes inside the tanks.

Bubbles of these gases are in the wastes, and they pop to the wastes' surfaces when the material moves or sloshes, such as

when it is pumped or even when the barometric pressure changes inside a tank. Vapors escape through access pipes, called risers, in the tops of the tanks.

Last year, CH2M Hill brought a team of local and outside experts to quiz tank farm workers and to study the contractor's safety measures. More-sensitive detection equipment has been installed to identify vapors long before they reach dangerous concentrations.

A similar team will be brought back this summer to see how effective the fix-it measures have been, Eberlein said.

15 Apr 03

# DOE mulling burial sites for Hanford wastes

■ *Public hearings to be held for comments on new impact study*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Hanford might dig several new deeper and wider trenches to bury all sorts of radioactive wastes.

Or it might dig one super-colossal expandable hole in the center of the site.

Those are among the Department of Energy's top recommendations for dealing with home-grown and imported "solid wastes" at Hanford. DOE recently unveiled its Hanford Solid Waste Environmental Impact Study.

That is a 3,000-page draft report on the numbers and ecological impacts of several proposals on how Hanford can deal with a wide variety of solid wastes. DOE expects to select a plan by July 31.

These solid wastes include low-level radioactive and transuranic wastes, which are

junk in barrels contaminated to various degrees of radioactivity. They also include mixed wastes, which are the same types of radioactive junk further contaminated with dangerous chemicals.

And they include low-activity

## Alternate

Hanford looks at bulk vitrification. **B1.**

radioactive tank wastes, which are expected to be glassified, or crystallized, or encased in

cement before being buried at Hanford. Finally, they include radioactive melters after they are used in the glassification complex being built in central Hanford.

The draft report predicts Hanford has or will generate 750,000 cubic meters of these wastes, including 210,000 cubic meters of treated low-activity tank wastes, said DOE's Hanford Manager Keith Klein on Monday.

Hanford expects to accept 21,000 to 360,000 cubic meters from other DOE sites,

See **DOE**, Page A2

## Briefs

### **Fluor Hanford layoff plan nears final stage**

Fluor Hanford ended its search Friday for people volunteering to be laid off, and will begin May 5 to sort out who may be involuntarily laid off.

The company is now partly through the third and final stage of a work force reduction that began late last year.

So far, 260 Fluor employees have been laid off or volunteered to leave the company in two previous work force cutting stages. This third stage will identify up to 140 additional workers to bring the overall reduction to about 400.

Fluor expects to notify the workers who are being laid off or otherwise terminated by May 16. Overall, Fluor Hanford's team employs slightly more than 4,000. The layoffs are part of Fluor shifting more workers away from administrative tasks toward on-the-ground cleanup efforts to comply with the Department of Energy's moves to accelerate Hanford's cleanup.

The people who volunteered to be laid off likely will be those who are eligible for good severance packages, said Fluor spokesman Michael Turner.

# Help wanted: FFTF closure

■ *DOE issues 'request for interests' in taking over shutdown project*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy is trying to find out if small businesses are interested in taking charge of shutting down Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility.

DOE published a "request for interests" Friday on the Federal Business Opportunities Web site seeking bids to take over the project currently supervised by Fluor Hanford.

In this case, a small business can employ up to 500 people and one or more small businesses must handle at least 51 percent of the work.

The potential shutdown contract could be worth \$500 million, said DOE spokeswoman Colleen Clark.

This move is part a nationwide DOE effort to farm out more work to small businesses. Speculation has floated around for months that DOE would do this.

"We doing this because the scope makes sense for small business. The question is there enough interest?" Clark said.

DOE wants interested businesses to reply by May 3. DOE then would have to determine whether enough qualified prospective bidders exist.

If there are enough, DOE could send out a request for proposals within six months, Clark said.

24 APR 03

# Hanford worker receives \$150,000

■ *Feds issue check to prove compensation program progressing*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

Thomas Keefe, 81, doggedly filled out paperwork and collected records since 2001 as his application for compensation for cancer caused by radiation at Hanford slowly wound through the federal departments of Energy and Labor.

He kept the telephone number for the program posted on his fridge and would occasionally call and ask how his claim was progressing. But the retired chemical operator did not expect much to come of his effort.

"Oh, I doubted it all the time," he said.

That was before Wednesday, when he held a check for \$150,000. Deputy secretaries from the Labor and Energy departments shook his hand and called him a hero for his work to win the Cold War.

"Everybody has got in mind it's crooked," Keefe said. "This is to prove it is not crooked. It's honest."

Crowds at public meetings had turned hostile as former workers and their survivors questioned whether they would really receive money from a federal program meant to pay the medical bills and provide compensation for workers harmed as Hanford produced the plutonium used in nuclear weapons.

For decades, the Department of Energy denied that radiation received by workers

See **Worker**, Page A2



26 APR 03

## ■ Washington Closure Co. to be in charge; to replace Bechtel

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

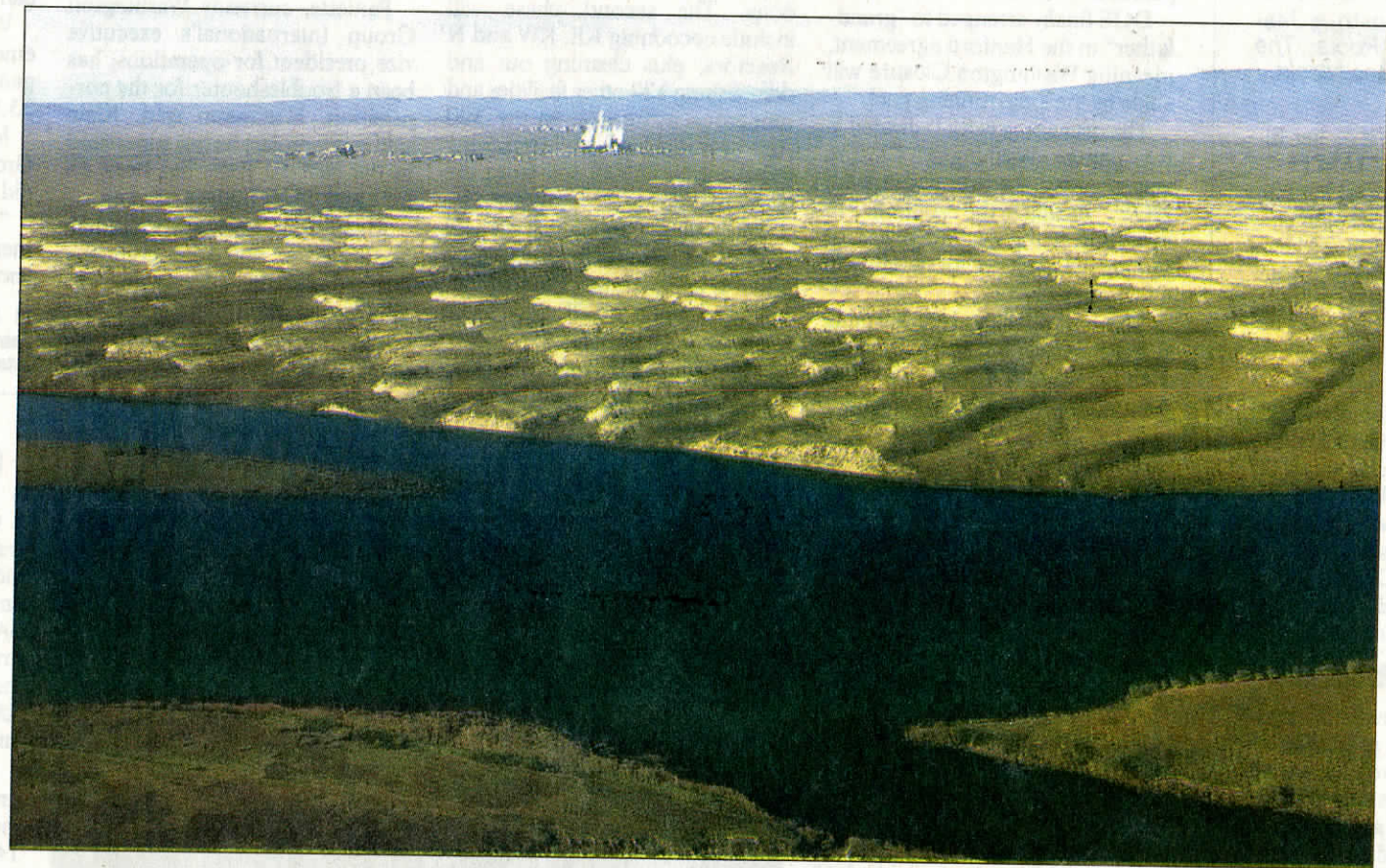
A team led by Washington Group International will be Hanford's new river corridor cleanup contractor under a \$1 billion agreement announced Friday.

Boise-based Washington Closure Co. will replace Bechtel Hanford on July 24 as the contractor in charge of removing contaminated soil from Hanford's Columbia River shore, as well as demolishing and sealing the site's old reactor complexes. Washington Closure also will take over the 300 Area's cleanup from Fluor Hanford.

Meanwhile, Bechtel Hanford will end nine years at the site, posting 13 straight "outstanding" ratings in annual and semi-annual grading periods. It employs about 700 people.

Deputy Secretary of Energy Kyle McSlarrow said Friday that the long-delayed contract will go to a team of Washington Group, Fluor Federal Services of Richmond and Earth Tech of Long Beach, Calif. Washington Group emerged from a Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization 15 months ago.

"Washington Closure Co. employed the most innovative techniques while cutting costs for the government," McSlarrow said.



Herald/Paul T. Erickson

The \$1 billion environmental cleanup contract for Hanford's river corridor area was awarded to Boise-based Washington

DOE estimated the river corridor work to cost about \$1.5 billion. Washington Closure's bid said it would do that work for slightly less than \$1 billion.

Washington Group spokesman Jack Herrmann said the new contract gives Washington Closure flexibility to juggle removal, demolition and other work schedules, which the team believes will lead to a \$500

million reduction from DOE's cost estimate.

Despite that leeway, Washington Closure's contract requires its to meet Tri-Party Agreement deadlines.

Nick Ceto, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Hanford site manger, said his staff plans to meet soon with the new contractor to stress that quality of the cleanup work

Closure Co., Deputy Secretary of Energy Kyle McSlarrow announced Friday.

should not be sacrificed for costs and speed.

The EPA is the lead regulator on the river shore cleanup and one of three entities that are part of the Tri-Party Agreement on cleanup. The state and DOE are the other parties.

Washington Closure beat bids submitted by a team of Bechtel National and CH2M Hill and a team led by Tetra Tech FW.

Bids were submitted last May, with the awarding of the contract originally scheduled last August.

Ceto said the EPA was nervous about the eight-month delay, but said the river corridor contract was awarded in time so the new team won't have much catch-up work to do.

See **Cleanup**, Page A2

# Workshop examines Hanford's history

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

A two-day free public workshop on preserving Hanford's historical heritage is scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday in Richland.

The workshop is coordinated by the Atomic Heritage Foundation, which is putting together a report to Congress with recommendations on how to preserve the history of the Manhattan Project at Hanford, Oak Ridge, Tenn., Los Alamos, N.M., Chicago and elsewhere.

The foundation is tackling the project with a \$250,000 grant from the Department of Energy, said Cindy Kelly, the foundation's president.

Wednesday's session will run from 1 to 6 p.m. at the Federal Building and will address mostly background issues.

Topics will include the Manhattan Project story at Hanford, Hanford's history before World War II, the site's cleanup plans, long-term post-cleanup and ownership issues, the possibility of creating a national park at the site, and Hanford's tourism potential.

Thursday's session will run from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Federal Building. Participants will brainstorm ways to preserve Hanford's history. The foundation's report is expected to go to Congress in June.

The Washington, D.C.-based non-profit Atomic Heritage Foundation was created a little more than a year ago to promote and coordinate the preservation of history from the early atomic age.

Its three-person board of directors is composed of Kelly, retired DOE Hanford Manager John Wagoner and Richard Rhodes, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Making Of The Atomic Bomb*.

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# Tri-Cities seeks \$4.9 million from DOE for economic transition

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The Tri-Cities is asking the Department of Energy for almost \$5 million in economic transition money in fiscal 2003.

Realistically, the entire request won't be granted.

"We're not going to get the full \$5 million," said Sean Stockard, who manages the 3161 program for the Tri-City Industrial Development Council.

The program gets its name because it is authorized under Section 3161 of 1993's Defense Authorization Act. It is meant to

help cities retrain workers, find new businesses or improve existing ones to counteract unemployment coming from DOE pulling out of former nuclear weapons sites.

TRIDEC manages the program for the Mid-Columbia. Last year, it obtained \$600,000 for industrial recruitment and developing minority-owned businesses.

This year, the Tri-City area is asking for \$4.9 million out of the \$21.2 million pool available to all cities with DOE sites.

Organizations and governments submitted their proposals to a TRIDEC economic transition committee, which sifts

through them to see what it will submit to DOE's Richland office late next week.

"We wanted to submit every project that we thought had a chance," Stockard said.

Then, DOE's Richland office will send its recommendations to DOE's Washington, D.C., headquarters, which is expected to announce the allocations by the end of summer.

TRIDEC's submissions will be:

- \$200,000 for a TRIDEC fund to provide incentives for businesses to locate in the Mid-Columbia. This includes a follow-up request of an extra \$1.8 million — if available — to bump the total

request to \$2 million.

- \$1.5 million to help construct an industrial shell building at the Port of Pasco's Big Pasco complex.

- \$200,000 to upgrade the Port of Pasco's T-131 light manufacturing building at the Big Pasco complex.

- \$200,000 to the Tri-Cities Assets Reinvestment Co. TARC is a TRIDEC subsidiary that accepts and sells excess Hanford equipment with the profits going to a business recruitment fund.

- \$200,000 to the Tri-Cities Enterprise Center to finance loans to fledgling small businesses.

- \$200,000 to TRIDEC to pay for the nuts-and-bolts work of industrial recruitment.

- \$200,000 to TRIDEC to help minority-owned businesses.

- \$200,000 to the Tri-Cities Visitors & Convention Bureau for tourism development.

- \$200,000 to the Tri-Cities Visitors & Convention Bureau to market the new convention center in Kennewick.

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25 APR 03

# Benton, Hanford still working out alert system

■ *County officials hope to resolve issues by May 22 deadline*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

Hanford and local emergency coordinators apparently will spend another month trying to iron out their differences over Hanford's emergency alert system.

But Benton County officials

are ready to increase the pressure if their issues are not resolved by May 22.

The Benton County Emergency Services board is unhappy with the Department of Energy's response to concerns about half-hour and 1½-hour delays in alerting the public about suspected radioactive airborne emissions Feb. 5 at the K East Basin. The alarms turned out to be false.

Benton, Franklin and Grant county emergency services departments sent letters to DOE

in March voicing their concerns and requested that the counties assume control of Hanford's warning sirens along the Columbia River.

On Feb. 5, it took 2 hours, 5 minutes from the first monitor alarm until the K Basins crew called for self-contained breathing equipment.

Then Hanford issued two take-cover orders at about 2½ hours and 3 hours after the first monitor alarm before ultimately alerting county emergency dispatchers after 3½ hours had passed.

A take-cover order is a standard Hanford procedure that requires all people near the incident to go indoors to protect themselves from potential airborne radioactive and chemical emissions.

Local emergency officials believe they should have been alerted when the self-contained breathing equipment was requested and when the take-cover orders were issued.

DOE replied with a letter that said the call for self-contained

breathing equipment and the take-cover orders did not meet Hanford's criteria for alerting local officials. And DOE wants to keep control of the warning sirens.

At a Thursday meeting, Benton County Emergency Services board members and staff voiced dissatisfaction with DOE's reply.

"With DOE, we have a problem with them classifying

See **Alert**, Page B2

30 APR 08  
■ *Letter by Idaho lab official says FFTF best spot for fuel research*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Citizens for Medical Isotopes has put its latest hope in resurrecting Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility in a Thursday letter saying that the FFTF is the best existing facility to do some reactor fuel research.

At a Tuesday news conference, group spokesman Carl Holder produced a letter written by Doug Crawford, associate director of the nuclear technology division at the Argonne National Laboratory's site at Idaho Falls.

Crawford wrote that the FFTF and a shutdown Idaho Falls test reactor are the only American reactors capable of doing some fuel and materials testing for four of six reactor types cited in a Department of Energy report as promising ones to build in the future. He added some Japanese and French reactors also have the testing capability.

The January DOE report on nuclear fuel research to Congress is the same document that FFTF supporters publicly cited in February as an argument that the federal government needs a sodium-cooled fast reactor, which is what the FFTF is.

An appendix in DOE's report cited an international coalition of reactor researchers looking at developing a new generation of reactors and nuclear fuel tech-

nologies.

The coalition selected six types of reactors as having the best potential. A sodium-cooled fast reactor is one of the six types noted. Neither the main report nor the appendix mentioned the FFTF by name.

The Idaho Falls test reactor is further along in the shutdown process than the FFTF, Crawford wrote. With the recent removal of the super-heated liquid sodium from the FFTF's secondary cooling system, there is now an undetermined, but limited time before the drastic cooling leads to irreversible flaws in the coolant pipes.

Tuesday's news conference followed the Benton County commissioners' Monday 3-0 vote to withdraw from appealing a federal judge's ruling that allowed the FFTF's shutdown to proceed.

That means there is no active litigation under way to try to revive the reactor.

But in a Tuesday phone interview, Claude Oliver, a county commissioner and president of Citizens for Medical Isotopes, speculated that the commissioners could face another vote on whether to revive the litigation.

The unanimity of Monday's vote to drop the appeal was surprising.

That's because Oliver has been a die-hard leader in reviving the FFTF, continuing the battle after many allies have dropped the matter because they believe it is fruitless.

Commissioner Max Benitz Jr.

See **FFTF**, Page B2

1 MAY 05

## ■ Ecology tells DOE mixed wastes pose 'serious hazard'

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The state gave the Department of Energy some mandated deadlines Wednesday to dig up, check and safely store buried radioactive wastes that are laced with dangerous chemicals.

This is the latest move in a head-butting contest between the state and DOE over who can order whom regarding Hanford's buried barrels of wastes.

With this move, the state is invoking its legal authority over mixed wastes, which are radioactive wastes further contaminated with dangerous chemicals.

The state is declaring that those mixed wastes buried in unlined Hanford trenches pose "an imminent and substantial" environmental and health threat, which DOE must address as soon as possible.

"We believe a serious hazard exists, and it increases every day," said Tom Fitzsimmons, director of Washington's Department of Ecology.

DOE received the state's order Wednesday and is still reviewing it, said

DOE spokeswoman Colleen Clark.

Regarding the state's contention that the buried barrels pose a substantial and imminent threat, Clark said: "We absolutely do not believe that is true."

All this revolves around the state having legal authority over mixed wastes, but it does not have legal authority over transuranic wastes that DOE recognizes. The two sides are disputing whether the Tri-Party Agreement requires DOE and the state to set transuranic waste removal deadlines that the state can enforce.

So far, the state has not been able to get DOE to agree to deadlines on getting

several months ago as too State law requires all new non-

Hanford's buried transuranic waste barrels dug up and ready to move to a permanent storage site in New Mexico. Transuranic wastes are highly radioactive with long half-lives, meaning they take thousands to millions of years to decay to almost nothing.

Hanford has an estimated equivalent of 75,000 buried 55-gallon barrels of these wastes.

Now, the state is citing the likelihood that an unknown number of these same barrels hold dangerous chemicals as well.

See **Wastes**, Page B2

2 MAY 05

MAY 03

## ■ Richland workshop outlines need to secure Hanford's historical heritage for future

By **Kristin M. Kraemer**

Herald staff writer

Opening the B Reactor for regular tours and helping the city of Richland maintain the alphabet homes were just two of the 16 recommendations generated this week in an effort to preserve the properties and history of the Manhattan Project and the Atomic Age.

About three dozen people attended the two-day brainstorming session, which wrapped up Thursday in Richland, to make sure Hanford's historical heritage is secured for years to come.

The workshop was coordinated by the Atomic Heritage Foundation, which is researching ways to preserve the Man-

hattan Project history at Hanford, Oak Ridge, Tenn., and Los Alamos, N.M.

The foundation now will take the recommendations from workshops at all three sites and submit a report to Congress in June. The proposal is likely to seek National Park Site designations for the three properties.

"The National Park Service is nationally recognized as shining a light on important resources that matter, that have an importance in history," said Cindy Kelly, president of the Atomic Heritage Foundation. "It's really a great boon. Plus, (Hanford) will have the synergy of related Manhattan Project park sites in Tennessee and New Mexico."

The project's vision, as created by workshop participants, is that "the public and future generations will have access to the significant resources related to the Manhattan Project on the Hanford site through educational interpretation and physical interaction."

Kelly said it was a productive workshop with participation from experts on cultural resources at the site, people who worked on the Manhattan Project and representatives of the National Park Service and state economic development office.

The foundation is working off a \$250,000 grant from the Department of Energy to develop a preservation plan, as requested by Congress. The plan must consider the costs of preserving the most significant remaining buildings and other aspects of the history, and identify strategies for their long-term stewardship, Kelly said.

One of the foundation's primary goals with this report is to urge Congress to authorize and pay for a special resource study of Manhattan Project properties.

"We need to do the study to show Congress that it makes sense, that it's suitable and feasible," Kelly said.

Recommendations for Hanford also included allowing site access for road

tours; protecting, stabilizing and maintaining structures, sites, artifacts and records; preserving the T Plant for public viewing and interpretation; and implementing public access to the site via the railroad and the Columbia River.

"There's a national passion for things related to World War II right now," Kelly said. "I just think that we have a potential for getting a lot of momentum on this."

The Atomic Heritage Foundation, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit corporation, was created a little more than a year ago to promote and coordinate the preservation of history from the early Atomic Age.

People can comment on Hanford's National Park Site potential and the preservation plan on the foundation's Web site at [www.atomicheritage.org](http://www.atomicheritage.org).

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2 MAY 02

# Hanford could begin using lined trenches in near future

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

Hanford could begin using specially lined burial trenches by about 2006 or 2007 for some radioactive and chemical wastes.

That's the recommended alternative among six options listed in a revised draft solid waste environmental impact study, said Mike Collins of the Department of Energy.

Collins' reply was to a question posed at a Thursday public hearing on a 3,000-page revised draft.

A previous draft was criticized several months ago as too

skimpy. The new draft outlines options for how Hanford can accept, bury, check, treat or export low-level radioactive wastes, transuranic wastes, mixed chemical and radioactive wastes, glassified or otherwise treated low-activity radioactive tank wastes and used radioactive melters.

DOE has been criticized for allowing low-level radioactive and chemical-laced wastes to be buried in unlined trenches that can allow contaminants to seep out.

The study reviews three options with lined trenches and three without liners.

State law requires all new non-

Hanford landfills to have lined trenches, he said. Collins said DOE is not legally required to line new trenches at Hanford, but noted DOE's tentative first choice calls for lined trenches.

Thursday's was the first of six such hearings on the draft, with DOE expecting to select its options by July 31.

Other hearings are scheduled in Spokane on May 7, La Grande on May 12, Portland on May 13, Hood River on May 14 and Seattle on May 15.

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24 APR 03

## **Bechtel group donates money to area groups**

The Bechtel Women's Group is donating \$41,000 to buy instruments for the Boys & Girls Club's Los Amigos Musicos program.

The privately funded organization plans to present the Boys

# April's showers establish Hanford weather record

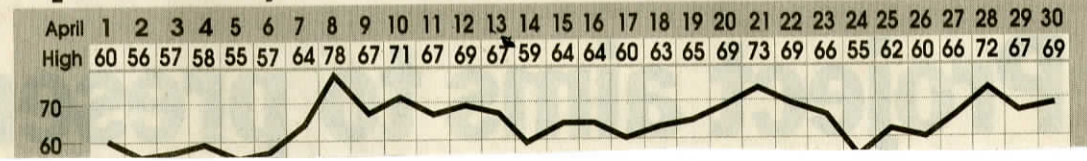
**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

Mother Nature's tears.  
An Oscar nominee's tears.  
April was a real tearjerker of a month, being the rainiest April in Hanford's history as well as giving

## *The Evil Dead.*

*Evil Dead* director Sam Raimi went on to direct *The Evil Dead II*, *The Quick And The Dead*, *A Simple Plan* and *Spiderman*. Its assistant editor Joel Coen went on to direct *Raising Arizona*, *Fargo* and *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

## April cool, wettest on record



eson. "I watch them. They sometimes scare me. But I can't tear myself away from watching them," she said.

Actually, April was less windy than normal, averaging 7.8 mph compared to the normal 10.5 mph.

2 MAY 03

# Wind project concerns LIGO

■ *Scientists worried  
turbines could affect  
sensitive instruments*

**By Jeff St. John**

Herald staff writer

PROSSER — Wind power squared off with the force of gravity Thursday, as a Benton County board considered a controversial wind power project scientists say could jeopardize about \$500 million in gravity research projects at Hanford.

The Benton County Board of Adjustment postponed until July further discussion on whether to approve a proposed 500-megawatt Maiden Wind Project after scientists from two Hanford-based gravity research programs spoke against the project.

"We are not at all opposed to wind power," said Fred Raab, head of the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory, or LIGO. "Our concern is the location of the site and the fact that it puts the LIGO program in jeopardy."

The Maiden Wind Farm would build up to 550 wind turbines along the southwestern slopes of Rattlesnake Ridge, some within 1,000 feet of the Hanford area's southeast border.

The closest are about 10 miles from the LIGO facility, a federally funded joint venture by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the California Institute of Technology.

Raab said that's close enough to cause ground vibrations that could disrupt the ultra-sensitive mirrors and 2½-mile-long laser beams LIGO uses to detect gravity ripples from deep space.

The federal government has spent about \$400 million so far on LIGO, and plans to spend another \$100 million to \$200 million in the next year, Raab said. With another similar facility in Louisiana and other researchers around the world dependent on LIGO's smooth operation, any vibrations could cause problems, he said.

"The question boils down to, is Benton County willing to risk a half-a-billion dollar investment," said Roy Gephart, project manager for the Battelle Gravitational Physics Laboratory, another research project on the Hanford site about six miles from the proposed wind farm.

Gephart and Raab said the

See **Wind**, Page A2

# State, DOE at odds over waste

## ■ Court order sought to stop outside transuranic waste shipments to Hanford

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy says only a tiny amount of transuranic wastes from two small labs are definitely going to Hanford.

Any DOE documents saying more transuranic wastes will go to Hanford are just speculation at this time, a DOE attorney argued Friday.

But the state of Washington says DOE e-mailed it a long official list of DOE sites that are going to send their transuranic wastes to Hanford.

That was one of the disputes contested in a Friday hearing in U.S. District Court

in Yakima. The state and four environmental watchdog organizations want a federal court order to stop DOE from sending outside transuranic wastes to Hanford until DOE conducts new studies on the overall transuranic waste situations, and agrees to deadlines for dealing with both Hanford's and imported transuranic wastes.

But DOE contends the state has no legal authority over any transuranic wastes.

However, the state contends that the Tri-Party Agreement and the likelihood of dangerous chemicals being mixed with the transuranic wastes gives it legal authority over Hanford-related transuranic wastes.

Meanwhile, DOE stopped transuranic waste shipments from two small labs in California and Ohio to Hanford until Tuesday, hoping U.S. District Judge Alan McDonald would dismiss the litigation on Friday.

But McDonald said he will need at least 10 days to deliberate on Friday's arguments. So he extended the stop-shipment order until he makes his ruling.

This litigation emerged from three months of deadlocked negotiations between the state and DOE on setting milestones for shipping of transuranic wastes into and out of Hanford.

Cynthia Huber, a U.S. Department of Justice attorney representing DOE, said the state "didn't like how the negotiations went. ... This is an action they are taking to try to club (DOE) into submission."

Transuranic wastes are barrels filled with junk contaminated with highly radioactive particles with long half lives, meaning it takes thousands to millions of years for their radioactivity to decay to almost nothing.

Hanford currently has 52,000 cubic meters of transuranic wastes. DOE's long-publicized master plan has been to

send transuranic wastes from small DOE sites without the right processing facilities to Hanford. That's because Hanford already has a facility to check and repack these barrels so that a permanent storage site in New Mexico will accept them.

Huber contended the state and environmental groups were improperly arguing on too broad of an issue.

She contended that DOE has solidly committed to shipping only 36 cubic meters from a California lab and an Ohio lab to Hanford. She said that although DOE has written proposals to send transuranic wastes from other sites to Hanford, the federal agency has not actually adopted any of those plans

Therefore, she argued, any references to other DOE sites sending wastes to Hanford would be speculation. And she said the state's and environmental groups'

See **Wastes**, Page B2

## Briefs

### **Hanford waste technology opportunity deadline Friday**

Fluor Hanford has set a Friday deadline for businesses interested in submitting information about technologies they've developed for cleanup and treatment of radioactive wastes at Hanford.

Businesses with technologies related to barrels of long-term radioactive wastes, called transuranic wastes, can complete a survey, and 25 businesses will be chosen to take part in a U.S. Department of Energy workshop in June. For a survey form or more information, contact Christina Richmond, with Seattle-based facilitation firm EnviroIssues, by e-mail at [crichmond@enviroissues.com](mailto:crichmond@enviroissues.com) or by phone at 206-269-5041.

## ■ Firm claims Washington Closure can't do Hanford river cleanup work at bid

8 MAY 03  
By John Stang

Herald staff writer

Washington Closure Co.'s winning bid for Hanford's rivershore corridor contract is "unrealistically low," said Bechtel, one of the losing bidders.

That claim refers to Washington Closure saying it can do the work for \$974 million while the Department of Energy's budget crunchers estimated the job would cost about \$1.5 billion.

Bechtel released a written statement Wednesday to elaborate on why it filed a protest Monday with the federal General Accounting Office. Bechtel declined to elaborate.

Washington Closure, a three-company team led by Washington Group International, was awarded Hanford's new river corridor cleanup contract on April 25, defeating two other teams led by Bechtel National and Tetra Tech FW.

Washington Closure says its budget estimates are on target. "We submitted a

strong creative bid, and we stand behind it," said Washington Group spokesman Jack Herrmann.

Bechtel Hanford, which is part of Bechtel National, has been doing Hanford's river-oriented cleanup work for the past nine years, earning 13 straight "outstanding" grades in annual and semi-annual rating periods.

It is practically impossible for anyone outside of DOE to compare how Washington Closure's, Bechtel's and Tetra Tech FW's bids stacked up with each other because of federal procurement rules. That means DOE won't discuss details of losing bids. And the losing teams won't reveal details either.

However, Bechtel believes it was the front-runner entering the final stretch of the often-delayed bid evaluation process. Bids were submitted in May 2002, and a contract was supposed to be awarded in late August 2002. Instead, the process extended eight more months to late April.

After the last revised bids were submitted in January 2003, Bechtel scored higher on technical issues than Washington Closure, and Bechtel's cost estimates were considered more realistic, Bechtel's written statement claimed.

"This is why we don't understand why

the rankings of the technical proposals were reversed at the end. ... We believe there may have been a flaw in the decision process and that our proposal should have been highest rated in accordance with DOE's established evaluation process," the statement said.

Tetra Tech FW has until May 25 to file its own protest. A Tetra Tech FW spokesman declined to say Wednesday whether an appeal is being considered.

DOE declined to comment on specific claims in Bechtel's statement. "We wouldn't have awarded the contract to (Washington Closure) if we did not think they could do the work for that price," said DOE spokeswoman Colleen Clark.

Bechtel's protest went to the GAO, which is Congress' investigative arm. The GAO has until Aug. 13 to rule on Bechtel's appeal. The protest stopped a 90-day transition of the river corridor work from Bechtel Hanford to Washington Closure. Bechtel Hanford will continue its rivershore work until a new contractor takes over.

The new river corridor contract is part of DOE's master plan to finish most of Hanford's rivershore area work by 2012. This work is split into two phases, and the disputed contract covers the first phase. The new contractor is supposed to remove

much of the contaminated soil from the rivershore, finish demolishing and sealing three old reactor complexes and begin cleanup of the 300 Area.

If Washington Closure hits its budget target on all of its work, DOE will pay it \$82 million. The team's package calls for it to receive more DOE payments if it goes under budget to be penalized money if it goes over budget.

Other than Tri-Party Agreement milestones, Washington Closure's package has no set deadlines.

A week ago, Ralph DiSibio, president of Washington Group's energy and environmental operations, said the winning bid was based on experience at other DOE sites, on more updated information than analyzed by DOE's budget crunchers and on some cost-cutting technologies and scheduling practices.

Also, the rivershore work force would be juggled to put more people in the field and less in administration — a move that he said would reduce the team's payroll.

Washington Group's teammates are Fluor Federal Services and Earth Tech.

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# ■ *Bechtel held river corridor cleanup project past 9 years*

T M A Y 03

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Bechtel National filed a protest Monday, contesting the award of an approximately \$1 billion Hanford river corridor contract to Washington Closure Co., Bechtel officials said Tuesday.

That stops a barely begun 90-day transition of Hanford's river corridor work from Bechtel Hanford to Washington Closure, said Colleen Clark, a Department of Energy spokeswoman.

However, actual cleanup

along Hanford's Columbia River shore will continue under Bechtel Hanford through the protest period, she said.

Bechtel's protest went to the federal General Accounting Office, which is Congress' investigative arm. The GAO has 100 days to review information from all sides and make its decision.

The 100-day period ends Aug. 13. The 90-day transition between Bechtel and Washington Closure originally was supposed to end July 24.

On April 25, DOE announced that Washington Closure's three-company team beat two other teams in obtaining Hanford's new river

See **Bechtel**, Page A2

# 4 MAY 03 History columnist honored

**By Cara Fitzpatrick**

Herald staff writer

For three years, Darby Stapp has dedicated himself to raising public awareness about efforts to preserve Washington's cultural and historic resources by writing a regular column for the Tri-City Herald.

In late April, he was honored for his work with a State Historic Officer's Award for Outstanding Achievement in the media category. The award will be presented to him May 15 in Seattle.

"We were really impressed that he was writing a column on these issues because it is not a topic that is covered often," said Allyson

Brooks, the state historic preservation officer.

Although Stapp works full time at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, he began writing the column in his free time because he thought the public was unaware of the Mid-Columbia's historical sites.

"It had been a trend in the archaeology field to communicate with the public about what we're doing, and the column seemed like a good way to do that," he said.

Stapp has covered a variety of topics in his column, called Cultural Resources, such as the Hanford Reach, Columbia Point and current trends in the archaeology field.

"I usually try to find something with a connection to the community or that is timely," he said.

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation also won an Outstanding Achievement award for Public Education because of their work with HAMMER and the Cultural Resources Protection Program.

The state Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation began the award program 13 years ago but only added the media category in 2000. This year there were 12 winners in seven categories.

■ Reporter Cara Fitzpatrick can be reached at 582-1542 or via e-mail at [intern@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:intern@tri-cityherald.com).



7 MAY 03

# Hanford halts pumping deadlines

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Hanford is removing the deadlines for pumping liquid radioactive wastes from two underground tanks so all their wastes can be removed by 2005.

The two tanks no longer will be covered by a federal court decree, which allows removal of their wastes to be accelerated, the Department of Energy and Washington's Department of Ecology announced Tuesday.

In 1998, the state threatened a lawsuit against DOE because work was behind schedule to pump liquid wastes from the site's 149 old leak-prone single-shell tanks into its 28 newer and

safer double-shell tanks.

To head off the litigation, the state and DOE agreed to a federal court decree that required liquids to be removed from the single-shell tanks by 2004.

Then several months ago, DOE unveiled a plan to have all the liquid and solid wastes removed from 26 to 40 tanks by 2006.

Right now, Hanford's 177 tanks hold 31 million gallons of solid wastes in single-shell tanks and 22 million gallons of liquid wastes mostly in the double-shell tanks.

Up to 365,000 gallons of pumpable liquid wastes remain in 13 single-shell tanks,

including the two covered by the new agreement. Two more single-shell tanks beyond those 13 are being evaluated to see if all their pumpable liquids are gone.

DOE is supposed to have the 365,000 gallons in the single-shell tanks reduced to 65,000 gallons by Sept. 30, according to the federal court decree.

However, DOE believes if it skips pumping the remaining liquids from Tanks S-102 and S-112, it can get a head start on removing all the wastes from those tanks by 2005, said DOE spokesman Erik Olds. The state agreed to let DOE try.

DOE has not yet determined the method for removing about

1 million gallons of solid and sludgy wastes from those two tanks, Olds said. Their wastes include 70,000 gallons of liquids in S-102 and 37,000 gallons in S-112.

Right now, Hanford is pumping slightly more than a cup of liquid wastes per minute from each of those tanks because it has to suck the fluids from cracks and shallow puddles in the solid wastes.

If the two tanks had remained under the court decree, Tank S-112 was due to have all liquids pumped out by Sept. 30 and Tank S-102 by Dec. 31.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).

## ■ DOE looking to contract small business for project

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy received enough interest by last weekend to continue to look at contracting a "small business" to take over dismantling Hanford's dormant Fast Flux Test Facility.

Last Saturday was a DOE deadline for interested companies to tell the federal agency that they might be interested.

"There was sufficient interest (by Saturday) for us to continue down that path," said DOE spokeswoman Colleen Clark.

Clark declined to identify the interested companies or say how many voiced an interest, citing federal procurement regulations. Twenty-three companies showed up at an April DOE briefing on the project.

Now DOE has to determine whether enough of the interested companies are qualified to tackle shutting down FFTF. If enough potential qualified bidders exist, a request for proposals is expected

to go out within six months.

In this case, a small business is defined as one with 500 employees or less. A small business would be allowed to team up with other small companies or with a big corporation, as long as small businesses do at least 51 percent of the work.

This move is part of a nationwide DOE effort to farm out more work to small businesses.

Right now, Fluor Hanford is shutting down the dormant experimental Hanford reactor because not enough missions existed to justify reviving it. And Fluor is interested in continuing that work.

Fluor has submitted a closure plan to DOE that would finish the project by 2013 — a proposal that is faster and more expensive than FFTF's current annual funding levels. DOE expects to review that proposal into the summer before accepting, rejecting or requesting changes to it.

Consequently, major unknowns exist in shutting, cleaning out and tearing down FFTF — the budget, the timetable and how much of the reactor complex will be left when the project is done.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).

# DOE OKs plan to delay glassification

## ■ State officials upset delay not included in Tri-Party Agreement

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy has adopted a plan that would delay sending the first radioactive wastes through a glassification plant by three years.

DOE also announced Thursday that it had approved a revised budget for the massive project that would require \$75 million more — up to \$5.675 billion.

State officials reacted angrily to DOE adopting the delay plan before negotiating its inclusion into the Tri-Party Agreement, the legal pact governing Hanford's cleanup. However, the Tri-Party

Agreement deadline of having Hanford's waste glassification complex fully operational by Jan. 31, 2011, remains intact in the DOE plan.

Thursday's announcement also said that DOE had authorized contractor Bechtel National to begin above-ground construction on the central Hanford treatment complex.

The latest figures are the result of reviews in the past few months by DOE and outside experts of the budget and schedules for building and testing the glassification complex.

They began the reviews with a predicted budget of \$5.6 billion and the first test run with

radioactive wastes to be done in 2007 and the complex to be fully running by 2011. Those dates are required under the Tri-Party Agreement.

Now the predicted budget through 2011 is \$5.675 billion, with the extra money for added contingency funds to cover unpredicted cost overruns. The new plan calls for construction to last until 2008 or early 2009, and tests with simulated wastes would begin in early 2009.

Overall, the new glassification budget breaks down to \$4.8 billion in predicted costs, \$225 million in fees to be paid to Bechtel and \$650 million in contingency funds.

Under the new plan, the first tests with actual radioactive wastes are expected to begin in 2010, not in 2007 as required by the Tri-Party Agreement. DOE

recently asked the state to agree to a change on that Tri-Party Agreement deadline.

DOE expects one year of radioactive tests at the three plants under construction will be sufficient to get the complex ready by 2011, said Howard Gnann, senior technical adviser at DOE's Office of River Protection.

The construction period is to be extended because that work already has fallen behind schedule. That's partly because of a recent problem with the engineering work not keeping up with the field work, Gnann said.

DOE believes the shortened testing periods with simulated and actual radioactive wastes will be sufficient, Gnann said.

But the state is unhappy DOE formally adopted the new timetable without fully discussing

it with the state and without getting the state's approval, said Sheryl Hutchison, spokeswoman for Washington's Department of Ecology.

DOE earlier told the Ecology Department it was looking at changing the timetable and had discussed a proposed delay to 2008 — but without the state agreeing to that change.

State officials have become increasingly angry in the past several months about DOE changing the glassification complex's designs before state officials believe they have been adequately consulted.

The state is the lead regulator of Hanford's radioactive-tank wastes under the Tri-Party Agreement.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).

9 MAY 03

### New boss

Bechtel names new glassification manager. **B8.**

9 MAY 03

# Shifting cleanup money stalled for now

■ *Delvin sent letter to Ecology protesting Locke's proposal*

**By Chris Mulick**

Herald Olympia bureau

OLYMPIA — One of the more anonymous budget remedies being considered in the Legislature would shift money out of a fund that will pay for cleanup of the commercial low-level radioactive waste disposal site in central Hanford.

U.S. Ecology operates the site for the state Department of Health. The site is used to store various commercial wastes with low levels of radioactive contamination.

The state has maintained a fund fortified with money from fees from customers in 11 Western states to pay for cleanup of the site once it closes.

That fund currently has \$32.4 million in it.

But Gov. Gary Locke's proposed budget would transfer \$13.8 million of that money to

the state's general fund to help plug a \$2.6 billion budget hole.

That prompted Rep. Jerome Delvin, R-Richland, to fire off a letter to the state Department of Ecology to protest.

## Olympia

2003



Delvin wonders how Locke can effectively demand federal funding to clean up high-level nuclear waste at Hanford when he doesn't adequately fund cleanup of low-level commercial wastes.

"I thought, 'wait a minute here,'" Delvin said. "It just seemed odd to me."

For now, budgets approved by the House and Senate do not shift money out of the fund, though lawmakers could change their minds if they are unable to resolve their budget differences.

In a letter to Delvin, state Department of

Ecology Director Tom Fitzsimmons said the remaining fund after the proposed transfer "will be inadequate for the purposes of meeting projected site closure costs."

That could require the state to charge customers more later on to rebuild the fund.

"It's important that money be available when it's needed," said Donn Moyer, a spokesman for the state Department of Health.

That's why budget officials have been considering ways to make any such transfer in the form of a loan so that it is repaid with interest.

But there's no guarantee future legislatures would agree to repay the money.

"We've been very vocal behind the scenes saying we need to rethink this," said Sheryl Hutchison, a spokeswoman for the Department of Ecology.

■ Reporter Chris Mulick can be reached at the Herald Olympia bureau at 360-753-0862 or via e-mail at [cmulick@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:cmulick@tri-cityherald.com).

# Hanford

set to start

pumping

solid wastes

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Hanford expects to start pumping solid radioactive wastes from an underground tank in late June.

CH2M Hill Hanford Group hopes to finish removing 622,000 gallons of mostly solid salt chunks from Tank S-112 this fall, beating the legally required finish date of September 2005, said Joel Eacker, the company's vice president for project delivery.

CH2M Hill is doing the final tests in northern Richland of a three-nozzle water spraying setup that will be inserted through Tank S-112's pipes to dissolve the salt chunks enough so an accompanying pump can suck out the material. The radioactive material will then be sent to a double-shell tank.

9 MAY 03

# Bechtel names new glassification boss

■ *Jim Henschel expected to take over project June 2*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

Ron Naventi, Bechtel National's Hanford glassification plant project manager, will be replaced June 2 by Jim Henschel, a Bechtel senior vice president.

The company said the change is part of Bechtel's practice of rotating top managers every two or three years.

Henschel is to arrive in the Tri-Cities a few weeks before June 2, and Naventi will stay a couple of weeks more to ensure a



**Naventi**

Naventi will move to Bechtel's San Francisco headquarters to become director of engineering for Bechtel Systems and Infrastructure Inc., which handles most of the corporation's Department of Energy, defense and other fed-

smooth transition. Henschel is currently executive vice president and general manager of Bechtel's Pipeline Business Unit based in McLean, Va., which oversees 4,000 employees on pipeline projects around the world.

eral work. He will be in charge of about 3,500 engineers worldwide, including about 1,000 at Hanford.

Bechtel's glassification plant team employs more than 3,000.

Naventi has been the first general manager of the Bechtel National glassification plant construction team that replaced BNFL Inc. in 2000. Construction started last year, and the complex is to be fully operational by 2011.

"We've got a great team in place. ... There's is an excellent foundation built to go forward," he said.

With degrees in electrical and mechanical engineering, Naventi worked for a

couple of engineering firms before a five-year stint with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. He then began 24 years with Bechtel.

Henschel has spent 29 years with Bechtel.

His work has included designing, building and licensing nuclear reactors; developing gas fields in Algeria; and building one of the world's largest oil-fired power plants and seawater desalination plants in Saudi Arabia.

"He brings a broad base of experience," Naventi said.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-city-herald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-city-herald.com).

## MOJO RETURNS

Ryan Franklin goes 7 1/3 innings to get Mariners back on track in 6-3 win over White Sox.

SPORTS, C1



## TESTY TOMATOES

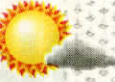
Unpredictable spring temperatures make planting tomatoes a gamble.

LIFE, D1



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Real Feel: High 79, Low 44

FORECAST, A14

SATURDAY

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OVER

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# DOE halts major cleanup at Hanford

■ *Agency says state order not to create 'mixed wastes' prompted stop-work order*

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy ordered Hanford contractors Friday to stop all work indefinitely that could create chemical wastes at its nuclear cleanup site.

Saying an order from the Washington Department of Ecology prompted the action, federal officials halted a vast but undetermined amount of work, ranging from dealing with scrap plutonium to routine maintenance.

The effects on cleanup progress, envi-

ronmental safety and jobs at Hanford were unknown as of Friday evening.

The state immediately said it was willing to clarify or fix the controversial sentence, but federal officials did nothing to stop their action Friday.

The action was the latest chapter in an escalating battle

between federal and state officials over how much legal clout the state has to regulate Hanford.

In a brief news conference Friday, DOE's Hanford Manager Keith Klein blamed an April 30 order from the Department of Ecology that sets deadlines for Hanford to dig up, check and

store radioactive wastes that might hold dangerous chemicals.

The 14-page state order has one sentence that says: "DOE shall immediately stop creating a backlog of untreated mixed wastes."

DOE interprets that to mean Hanford's contractors cannot do even routine maintenance if it could create "mixed wastes," the term for radioactive wastes combined with dangerous chemicals.

"We believe the effects of the state's order ... impede the achievement of cleanup goals. ... We do not have the option to interpret the order in any way other than what is specifically spelled out in the plain language of the order," Klein said.

When questioned further, Klein kept returning to that statement.

When asked about the nine-day delay in responding to the state order, Klein said his agency needed time to study it to understand its ramifications.

The stop-work order was a mutual decision by DOE management in Richland and Washington, D.C., after consulting with DOE attorneys. DOE cleanup czar Jessie Roberson could not be reached for comment Friday.

In a written statement, Gov. Gary Locke said: "This rationale would be like your mother telling you not to let dirty dishes pile up in the sink, and you respond by not cleaning any dishes at all."

Sheryl Hutchison, Ecology Department spokeswoman, said DOE leaders "are trying to make a point that no one but they are going to get."

Ken Niles, spokesman for Oregon's

Department of Energy, said: "We're shocked that DOE would respond to an administrative order that way."

Shelley Cimon of La Grande, Ore., co-vic-chairwoman of the Hanford Advisory Board said: "DOE is overreacting to one sentence."

Hutchison said DOE never called the state between April 30 and Friday to clarify the sentence. DOE informed Tom Fitzsimmons, state ecology director, late Thursday evening about the action. Other state leaders were told either Thursday evening or Friday.

Hutchison said the controversial sentence was supposed to mean that the state wants DOE to treat any mixed waste as it is produced at Hanford, and that DOE

See DOE, Page A2

## ■ *Benton, Franklin, Yakima commissioners want Bush to understand loss of FFTF*

13 MAY 03

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

Nine county commissioners sent a letter to President Bush on Monday to make sure he understands the resources he's losing with Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility that could advance his National Energy Policy.

All commissioners of Benton, Franklin and Yakima counties signed a letter asking him to analyze the capabilities of FFTF that could advance his plans to revive nuclear energy.

Supporters of the reactor believe it could be used to test materials and fuels needed to develop the next generation of nuclear reactors.

A national report dated in December but just released April 24 by the Department of

“

### **I think (Bush) needs to know his future energy policy is threatened.**

Mike Fox, representative,  
Citizens for Medical Isotopes

”

Energy appears to support that potential use.

Although the Technology Roadmap for Generation IV Nuclear Energy Systems does not refer to FFTF directly, it discusses a need under some scenarios for a sodium-cooled fast reactor for testing.

“We feel it incumbent upon us to bring forward new, compelling information,” says the letter to the president.

It refers to both the technology roadmap and the January 2003 Report to Congress on Advanced Fuel Cycle Initiative, but says “Regretfully, the most promising national asset, the FFTF, is not being considered.”

The Clinton and current Bush administrations have ruled that the United States has no financially feasible use for the Hanford reactor. Liquid sodium was drained this spring from the reactor's secondary cooling loops, which will soon lead to corrosion and irreversible flaws in the coolant pipes.

The danger of corrosion will increase when the weather cools in the fall, Jerry Woodcock, representing the Eastern Washington Section of the American Nuclear Society, said at a news conference Monday.

“I think (Bush) needs to know his future energy policy is threatened,” said Mike Fox, representing Citizens for Medical Isotopes.

Although some development work needed for new nuclear reactors could be done overseas, supporters of restarting FFTF said other work would likely take precedence over DOE testing there.

■ **Reporter Annette Cary can be reached at 582-1533 or via e-mail at [acary@tricityherald.com](mailto:acary@tricityherald.com).**



# DOE's secrecy adds to mistrust

By the Herald staff

The chasm in the current relationship between the Department of Energy and the state is rooted in the often secretive operations of the Department of Energy under Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham.

It's also a reflection of just how much what once was a professional working relationship between the state and feds has deteriorated in the past two years.

That working relationship had evolved since 1989, when the state was preparing to sue DOE to force it to clean up Hanford. The site was the nation's most contaminated chunk of land after a 46-year history of Cold War plutonium production.

Neither side wanted a lawsuit, however, so DOE, the state and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency negotiated the Tri-Party Agreement. The complex legal contract set timetables and standards for Hanford's environmental cleanup.

In the years since, the three contract agencies often have revised the pact as they've learned more about the contamination and better ways to deal with it.

The relationship occasionally has been strained, as when the state issued fines or threatened suit for DOE missing Tri-Party Agreement requirements. But the regulators also have agreed to extend deadlines to help DOE, and they worked to convince Congress to increase Hanford's cleanup budgets.

In the process, the three agencies developed a solid working relationship based on DOE sharing information with its regulators and the public.

But the Bush administration and current Secretary Abraham brought major changes to Hanford and the nationwide nuclear cleanup.

DOE has become much more secretive, and often has not shared budget information until late in the process.

The state, EPA and other Hanford constituencies have grumbled that they could not get a good picture of cleanup plans early enough to provide meaningful feedback.

Abraham also unveiled a master plan to speed up nuclear cleanup nationwide while trimming costs. The concept has drawn praise from regulators, but there's also mistrust that DOE may try to cut corners.

That mistrust, in turn, has produced irritation at DOE's top levels with the pesky regulators.

# A breakdown in bureaucracy

■ Relationship between DOE, state on a downward spiral as order forces halt in cleanup

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

In 14 years of arguments over how to clean up the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, Washington state and the Department of Energy often have been at odds.

But Friday was the first time the two sides escalated to a brinkmanship that threatens to stymie cleanup, raise its costs and perhaps even idle many of the 12,000 people who work there.

Friday's announcement by DOE that it was closing down much of Hanford's cleanup work because the state had forced it to do so capped months of escalating hostilities.

DOE's announcement pointed at one sentence buried in a 14-page state order dealing with radioactive transuranic wastes. The agency said the April 30 state order means all work at Hanford that creates any radioactive fluids and chemicals must stop.

Like a rock tossed into a pond, the DOE order set off a series of ripple effects, many of them still unknown.

Immediately halted was all work to convert scrap plutonium into safer forms, the pumping of radioactive wastes from underground tanks, most analytical laboratory work, the removal of radioactive sludge from the K East Basin, maintenance on K Basins cleanup equipment and much of the site's maintenance.

The order — which was issued without first asking the state for clarification of the one sentence — came two months after the state and DOE filed federal lawsuits against each other.

Under dispute is how much power the state has under the 1989 Tri-Party Agreement, which regulates Hanford's environmental cleanup. The legal pact was signed by DOE, the state and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and set enforceable deadlines.

State officials have charged that DOE is increasingly ignoring the state's legal role in regulating Hanford. In turn, DOE has portrayed the state as claiming more legal clout than it is entitled to.

DOE's portrayal, however, suddenly shifted Friday to, "We're just following the state's orders."

Tom Fitzsimmons, director of Washington's Department of Ecology, said the relationship with DOE has weakened substantially.

"Our relationship with the Department of Energy, I'd characterize as a lot less collaborative and becoming a lot more regulatory over the last several months," he said.

Washington Attorney General Christine



Herald file

The state and Department of Energy are waging an escalating battle of wills over who will legally control how Hanford receives, digs up, checks, repacks and ships out barrels of transuranic wastes. Here, barrels of transuranic waste are lowered into a TruPact shipping container at the Waste Receiving and Processing center in Hanford's 200 West area.

Gregoire said DOE has become more secretive and has adopted cleanup plans without consulting regulators. "All that is DOE simply saying: 'Trust us,'" she said.

DOE is unwilling to talk about the rift.

Hanford's top two DOE managers — Keith Klein, head of DOE's Richland office, and Roy Schepens, head of DOE's Office of River Protection — have declined to be interviewed.

They referred questions to Jessie Roberson, DOE's cleanup czar in Washington, D.C. Roberson also declined to be interviewed but issued a brief written statement Tuesday.

"We have enjoyed a good working relationship with the state," she said. "We were recently disappointed, however, by the state resorting to lawsuits and other actions that mischaracterized our cleanup efforts. Those actions do not lend themselves to a strong climate of cooperation. However, (DOE) is certainly working very hard to meet our cleanup commitments."

Meanwhile, the EPA, Hanford's other lead regulator, shares some of the state's frustrations but is "kind of caught in the middle," said Nick Ceto, EPA's Hanford site manager.

"We're trying our best to talk with everybody," he said. "Overall, folks I've met at Energy sincerely think they are doing the right thing."

State frustrations began with a steady stream of DOE changes in the top-priority radioactive tank waste glassification complex that were made without state approval — and which run counter to the Tri-Party Agreement.

Gregoire said filing a lawsuit on the glassification plant changes is a last resort. But

she added, "I don't think we have any choice but to look at (litigation) as an option at some point."

The most recent dispute centers on who should regulate transuranic wastes. The highly radioactive wastes have long half lives, meaning it takes thousands to millions of years for their radioactivity to decay to almost nothing.

Hanford has an estimated 75,000 barrels of buried transuranic wastes, and another 9,000 barrels stored above ground.

Although the state does not have clear authority over those wastes, it says the Tri-Party Agreement requires DOE to negotiate a legally binding timetable for processing and preparing to move them to permanent storage in New Mexico.

DOE disagrees.

Talks began in December to settle the dispute. As a sign of good faith, the state said it would not oppose Hanford receiving 170 barrels of transuranic wastes from small DOE labs in Ohio and California labs during the talks.

In late February, the state and EPA thought they were on the brink of an agreement with DOE. But a day before the talks were to finish, DOE pulled out.

In a March 4 interview, Roberson said DOE never intended to relinquish any control of the wastes to the state and voiced puzzlement on why the state and EPA thought DOE would.

She said the talks were supposed to address other wastes, although the state and EPA said the talks' chief focus was transuranic wastes.

Gregoire is still angry.

"We did trust them. We trusted them so

“ We did trust (DOE). We trusted them so much that we allowed them to begin sending some transuranic wastes to Hanford during the talks. At the end of the day, they walked away from the table. ”

State Attorney General Christine Gregoire

much that we allowed them to begin sending some transuranic wastes to Hanford during the talks," she said. "At the end of the day, they walked away from the table."

Fitzsimmons speculated DOE might have pulled out of the talks either because DOE officials in Richland negotiated in good faith but were overruled by their Washington, D.C., superiors or because DOE wanted to test whether the state would compromise its tough stance on transuranic wastes.

On March 4, the state filed a federal lawsuit to stop DOE shipments of transuranic wastes to Hanford until a legal timetable is worked out. "Frankly, we are hopping mad," Gregoire said then.

That was followed by the state using a clause in the Tri-Party Agreement to issue two administrative orders setting transuranic waste disposal deadlines. That clause says the state has the final say in an impasse with DOE.

On April 9, DOE filed its own lawsuit, charging the state cannot arbitrarily set the deadlines.

On Friday, DOE dropped its biggest bomb, after nine days of scrutinizing the state's 14-page April 30 order. Page 12 has this sentence: "DOE shall immediately stop creating a backlog of untreated mixed wastes."

DOE chose to interpret that to mean Hanford cannot do anything that would create one new bit of mixed chemical-radioactive waste and ordered the work shutdown.

State officials say the sentence is supposed to mean only that DOE should treat any new mixed wastes as they are produced. The state says it is willing to clarify or rewrite the sentence.

After discussions Monday and Tuesday with DOE, the state agreed not to enforce the controversial sentence in its April 30 order for 30 days.

That is supposed to give DOE time to come up with a detailed breakdown on how the April 30 order would affect Hanford work. The state will study that breakdown to prepare for yet-to-be-scheduled talks on the issue.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).

## A brief look at recent disputes between the state, DOE

By the Herald staff

Here is a brief history of the recent disputes between the Department of Energy and the Washington Department of Ecology over how to handle Hanford's radioactive wastes in the site's 177 underground tanks:

■ DOE has decided it cannot glassify all 42 million gallons of the low-activity wastes by a 2028 Tri-Party Agreement deadline, so it started researching other ways to neutralize 27 million gallons of them. The state says any neutralization method must be as good as glassification.

The state is unhappy DOE has

wholeheartedly and unilaterally adopted a plan to remove a requirement that it must glassify all 42 million gallons.

■ DOE decided unilaterally it would use two melters, not one, to deal with 11 million gallons of high-level radioactive wastes and use two melters, not three, to glassify low-activity wastes.

Again, the state is angry DOE made that decision without input from regulators.

DOE said the two low-activity

melters currently envisioned can treat as much waste as the three originally planned. And DOE said a bottleneck in the glassification plant's equipment won't make three of the latest melter models much more efficient than two.

The state questions why a third low-activity melter should be sacrificed if DOE says it must find alternative technologies to deal with some of the wastes.

■ DOE said it will treat technetium 99 as a low-activity waste,

not a high-level waste.

Treated low-activity waste is to be buried in central Hanford. Glassified high-level wastes would eventually be shipped to Nevada.

DOE said its plan is significantly cheaper and noted the technetium radioactivity totals only 25,000 curies, a tiny fraction of 190 million curies in the 53 million gallons of tank wastes.

The state contends 25,000 curies is still a huge amount of radioactivity, which, if it escapes a

burial trench, will spread faster underground than most contaminants.

■ DOE recently adopted 2010 as the likely time to run the first radioactive materials through Hanford's glassification process. The state is angry because the long-standing Tri-Party Agreement deadline has been 2007.

DOE's newest plan keeps the 2011 deadline for having the glassification complex fully operational.

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13 MAY 03

## ■ Judge rules transuranic wastes cannot be transferred until litigation is resolved

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy cannot send transuranic wastes to Hanford until litigation over those wastes is resolved, a federal judge has ruled.

Late Friday, U.S. District Judge Alan

McDonald granted a state of Washington request to extend a temporary injunction until its lawsuit against DOE over transuranic wastes is settled in court. DOE and the state were not told about the ruling until Monday.

That ruling was one of several Monday developments in an escalating state-DOE feud over who controls transuranic wastes at Hanford.

Other developments were:

■ DOE stopped most work at the Plutonium Finishing Plant, but Hanford still was sorting out what other work might be

halted because of Friday's massive stop-work order. No layoffs are anticipated in the near future.

■ U.S. Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., asked Gov. Gary Locke and Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham to meet face to face to resolve Hanford's transuranic waste battle.

■ State and DOE officials met in Kennewick to try to clear up confusion in an April 30 state order that DOE blamed for its Friday order to halt all Hanford work that could create mixed wastes, which are radioactive wastes further contaminated

by hazardous chemicals. The meeting ended with some moves toward resolution but did not end the impasse.

The showdown is over transuranic wastes, which are highly radioactive junk that take thousands to millions of years for the radiation to decay to almost nothing. Hanford has about 84,000 barrels of transuranic wastes, with most of them buried.

DOE's master plan is to send transuranic wastes from Hanford and other cleanup projects to a permanent storage site in New Mexico.

74 MAY

# Stop-work order at Hanford may get resolved

■ *State suspends part  
of order that led to  
decision to halt work*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The state on Tuesday suspended until June 13 part of an April 30 order that the Department of Energy had interpreted as forcing a shutdown of much of Hanford's environmental cleanup work.

Tom Fitzsimmons, director of Washington's Department of Ecology, said in a letter to DOE

## Hanford Feud

Relationship  
between  
state, DOE  
on rocky  
road. **A4.**

that the reason for the suspension is to give DOE a chance to evaluate specific impacts it believes would result from strict compliance with the order.

Ecology Department staff will work with DOE to understand the federal agency's concerns, Fitzsimmons said.

However, his letter added that the state will enforce other regulations, legal requirements and

See **Hanford**, Page A2

# 17 MAY 03 Fluor trims 108 workers in May

■ *Lead contractor's work force now 4,225*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford trimmed another 108 employees in May — the majority through involuntary layoffs.

The company, which is Hanford's lead cleanup contractor and the site's largest firm, told 60 employees this week they will be laid off Thursday.

That means Fluor will have cut 377 people voluntarily or involuntarily since late 2002 to end up with a work force totaling 4,225 people, said com-

pany spokesman Michael Turner.

Overall, several contractors and DOE employ about 12,000 people on Hanford's cleanup.

With the Department of Energy putting greater emphasis on accelerating Hanford's cleanup, Fluor has been shifting more workers from administrative tasks to on-the-ground cleanup work. That has led to jobs cuts, predominantly in Fluor's administrative departments. The trimming took place in three stages from last December through May.

The first two rounds cut 269 people through involuntary layoffs or people volunteering to

leave because of the severance or early retirement packages.

In the third and final stage, Fluor trimmed 108 people in the past few weeks — 60 through layoffs, 38 who volunteered and 10 through normal attrition.

No future layoffs are planned, but Fluor cannot rule out it in the future, Turner said.

Turner said the company says it did not target older employees for termination. Fluor concentrated on eliminating positions without specifically looking at individuals, he said.

■ **Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).**

16 MAY 03

# Officials detail plant revisions

■ *Peak work force  
expected to be slightly  
more than 2,000 in 2006*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

The Hanford glassification plant project won't employ as many construction workers as originally planned, but its peak work force will stay on the job about a year longer.

Those predictions are part of Bechtel National's and the Department of Energy's revised construction plans. Details were made public Thursday.

Originally, Bechtel expected approximately 3,500 construction workers on the job in 2005 before major layoffs would start. Now, it appears the total will peak at slightly more than 2,000 in 2006, then drop significantly.

Right now, the project employs about 1,000 blue-collar workers.

Meanwhile, the work force of administrators, engineers and technicians will remain somewhat steady from today's total of slightly more than 2,000 to slightly less than 2,000 in 2007. Then, the white-collar jobs will begin a gradual decline until 2011.

The changes stem from a revised schedule that adds construction time while shrinking testing time for the radioactive tank waste glassification complex.

Roy Schepens, manager of DOE's Office of River Protection, Ron Naventi, Bechtel's departing glassification project manager, and Jim Henschel, Naventi's replacement, discussed the revisions Thursday

See **Plant**, Page B2

16 MAY 03

## CH2M Hill transferring health physics techs

CH2M Hill Hanford Group is preparing to transfer 24 health physics technicians to Fluor Hanford.

The transfer is because CH2M Hill is finishing some work that needed the technicians, while Fluor needs to add to its staff of health physics technicians, said CH2M Hill spokesman Geoff Tyree.

CH2M Hill is contacting its 113 health physics technicians to see if any will volunteer to be transferred to Fluor. Any remaining transfers will be determined by seniority.

Health physics technicians monitor people and work areas for contamination.

16 MAY 03

## Coalition of cities urges DOE, state to make up

A nationwide coalition of cities adjacent to Department of Energy sites has urged DOE and the state to resolve their dispute over transuranic wastes.

The Energy Communities Alliance sent a letter Wednesday that said Hanford cleanup could be hampered if the state and DOE continue their duel over transuranic waste in and out of federal court. The letter was signed by Richland Mayor Bob Thompson, the alliance chairman.

DOE and the state are fighting over whether the state has the legal clout to force deadlines on DOE for dealing with Hanford's transuranic waste.

That dispute has spilled over into mixed wastes, which are radioactive wastes contaminated by hazardous chemicals. The state has undisputed legal authority over mixed wastes.

Last week, DOE said that a state order was forcing it to shut down all Hanford work that could produce mixed wastes. The state contends DOE misinterpreted the order.

The state has suspended the controversial portion of its order until June 13, and DOE has stopped its shutdown while the two sides try to resolve their differences.

20 MAY 03

# ■ 875 employees may have to vacate buildings sooner under DOE's accelerated cleanup plan

**By Annette Cary**

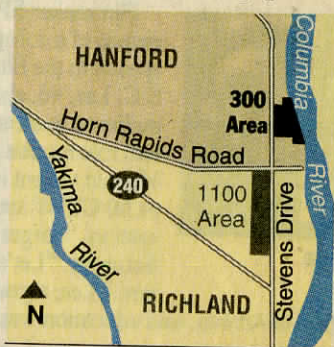
Herald staff writer

Pacific Northwest National Laboratory is considering what to do with its 875 employees who work in Hanford's 300 Area, as the Department of Energy moves to speed cleanup and tear down offices and laboratories there.

About 150 buildings are in the 300 Area at the north end of George Washington Way in Richland set for cleanup, including the Radiochemical Processing Laboratory.

PNNL's Web site calls the radiochemical lab one of its three strategic facilities that are anchors for its mission of research, development and deployment of solutions to the nation's critical environmental and health problems.

The laboratory uses 19 buildings in the 300 Area and had expected to use 10 of the most



Herald/Sherry Emery

important ones through at least 2018.

But as DOE moves to accelerate cleanup of the 300 Area, the laboratory expects to have to move out of some buildings no later than 2008 and possibly years earlier. The lab eventually will need to move out of most, if not all, buildings, lab officials believe.

As the 300 Area developed

See **PNNL**, Page A2

## Engineering company <sup>22 MAY 03</sup> wins Hanford contract

Richland-based Mid-Columbia Engineering Inc. has been awarded a \$7 million contract to help design, build and test automated sample-handling equipment for the Waste Treatment Plant at Hanford.

The contract with RWE NUKEM Corp. is for designing an automatic sampling system that will take liquid and glass shard samples and transport them to an analytical lab for treatment, the company said.

Mid-Columbia Engineering has regional offices in Bellingham and Knoxville, Tenn.

It was founded in 1975 and provides engineering and manufacturing services, primarily for the Department of Energy.

22 MAY 03  
■ Stone project could safely convert up to 10 million gallons of mixed wastes

By Annette Cary  
Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy is looking at turning some of its radioactive waste not into glass, but into stone.

The worst of the nuclear waste from Hanford's underground tanks will be melted into a glasslike material at the \$5.7 billion vitrification plant now being constructed at the nuclear reservation.

But DOE also is looking at other technologies that could be used for treating low-activity or mixed wastes. The vitrification plant cannot process by a 2028 deadline all the 53 million gallons of waste generated by 50 years of production of plutonium for nuclear weapons.



Raymond

The goal of the stone project is to convert up to 10 million gallons of the wastes into a form that would be safely contained for 1,000 to 10,000 years.

If history is a good indicator, it could be possible.

"Nature has made glasses that lasted millions of years," said Richard Raymond, director of treatment and disposal at CH2M Hill Hanford Group, which is evaluating supplemental technologies for DOE. "The Romans made cements that lasted thousands of years."

Hanford has experimented with concepts similar to the stone technology. It bound low-level wastes from the N Reactor in grout.

Grouts also are commonly used throughout the world to immobilize radioactive and hazardous wastes.

"We are trying to come up with a much more durable, stronger, better material to immobilize waste," said John Smets, project director with Fluor Federal Services, which holds a contract with CH2M Hill.

Researchers are working on a mixture

# DOE briefs advisory board on budget

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

Hanford needs \$182 million more than budgeted if it is to achieve a goal of closing 26 radioactive waste tanks by 2006.

CH2M Hill Hanford Group needs \$1.262 billion from fiscal 2004 through fiscal 2006 to do all of its work plus close at least 26 single-shell tanks, according to Department of Energy figures.

But it is budgeted to receive \$1.08 billion over those three years.

Closing those tanks by 2006 is a significant part of DOE's overall master plan to accelerate Hanford's cleanup. The Tri-Party Agreement, Hanford's legal timetable, calls for closing only seven tanks by 2011.

DOE officials briefed two Hanford Advisory Board committees Wednesday about the tank farms' budget predictions.

DOE wants to speed up closure of its

single-shell tanks, contracting with CH2M Hill to "close" at least 26 tanks by Sept. 30, 2006. The state and DOE have not agreed yet on what "closure" means, but it will include removing at least 99 percent of the solid and liquid wastes from each tank.

Meanwhile, DOE's tank waste budgets are somewhat locked in for the next few years.

Bechtel National's construction of a tank waste glassification complex is supposed to get \$690 million annually for the next several years. And CH2M Hill is supposed to maintain the tanks, remove the wastes and prepare the material for glassification for \$360 million annually through at least 2006.

But DOE's latest figures said CH2M Hill will need \$502 million for all of its work in fiscal 2004, which starts Oct. 1. The company will need \$434 million in 2005 and \$326 million in 2006.

That adds up to a \$182 million shortfall across three years.

DOE is not expected to request budgets greater than \$360 million annually for CH2M Hill's work.

CH2M Hill will have to improve its efficiency in removing wastes to bring down costs, said Delmar Noyes, division director for the tank farms program for DOE's Office of River Protection.

DOE officials noted that CH2M Hill has just finished a massive internal reorganization to help cut costs and speed up work. At least 62 people voluntarily or involuntarily left CH2M Hill during that reorganization. About 1,400 people remain in the company at Hanford.

HAB committee members voiced concerns about the budget increasing dramatically in 2004, then shrinking drastically in 2005. They said such a major fluctuation

See DOE, Page B5

that results in a cast stone that's less porous than marble, which would keep water out.

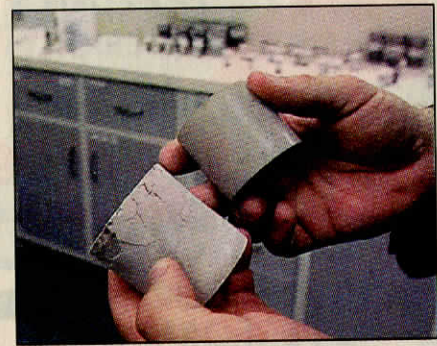
At the Center for Laboratory Science at Columbia Basin College, closely supervised students are stirring up various concoctions in what looks like an oversized kitchen mixer. They use five ingredients with a liquid to simulate tank waste.

"We're looking at not just physical, but chemical (ways to bind waste)," said Billie Mauss, DOE's Office of River Protection manager for supplemental technologies.

The mixture can include ferrous sulfite monohydrate to help bind chemicals and Attapulgate clay, a natural clay that's dried and can help trap radiation.

Other ingredients being tested are ash, blast furnace slag and Portland cement to bind it together.

A couple of hundred samples have been made to test for strength and "leachability" — when soaked in water or a mild acid, none of the waste should be detected in



the liquid. Next month testing will move from simulated waste that is not radioactive to waste that has been removed from Hanford tanks.

That testing will be done at the 222-S Laboratory at Hanford.

One of the technical problems the research team is working on is reducing the liquid holding the radioactive waste to

See Wastes, Page B2

# DOE, union ink tentative contract

By the Herald staff

The Department of Energy and its administrative workers' union signed a tentative three-year contract Tuesday.

Approximately 120 members of Local No. 788 of the American Federation of Government Employees have ratified the contract, which awaits final approval at DOE's Washington, D.C., headquarters.

The local represents nonmanagement administrative employees at DOE's Richland office and Office of River Protection.

The contract replaces a previous three-year pact that recently expired.

The contract addresses working conditions and performance awards. Salaries are already set nationwide by the federal government.

# Lawmakers lose bid to require trench liners for Hanford wastes

By Les Blumenthal

Herald Washington, D.C., bureau

WASHINGTON — The House Rules Committee refused Wednesday to allow two Washington state congressmen to offer an amendment to the defense authorization bill that would have required liners on trenches holding radioactive materials at the Hanford nuclear reservation.

Democratic U.S. Reps. Jay Inslee and Adam Smith had planned on offering their amendment as the House began work on the defense bill. But the Rules Committee, the gatekeeper for floor action, blocked the amendment.

Inslee, who once represented the congressional district where Hanford is located but now represents a suburban Seattle district, said he was disappointed and would ask the Rules Committee to reconsider.

If Washington state law requires that household garbage be buried in lined trenches, he said, the same should be true for radioactive waste at Hanford.

"There is no sense to require it for garbage and not radioactive waste," Inslee said.

The Department of Energy is working on an environmental impact statement involving the disposal of solid radioactive and mixed radioactive and chemical wastes at Hanford. A revised draft of the environmental statement recommended lined trenches as the preferred alternative. Hanford could start using such specially lined trenches by 2006 or 2007.

U.S. Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., a member of the House Rules Committee, opposed allowing the Inslee-Smith amendment on the floor.

ment to use lined facilities for radioactive waste," Inslee said. "It is very disappointing the Republican majority refused to allow a vote on whether we should protect the people living near radioactive dumps and our water supply from leaking radioactive waste."

A spokeswoman for Smith, Katherine Lister, said the lining of the trenches was a "commonsense step that DOE should take immediately to ensure the safety of our communities."

Smith is a member of the House Armed Services Committee, which has jurisdiction over the defense bill.

The amendment would have required the Energy Department to start lining new disposal trenches as of Jan. 1 at Hanford and other DOE nuclear sites. The liner requirement could be waived if the governor of the state where the facility was located, the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the DOE agreed.

Low-level radioactive and chemical-laced wastes have been buried in the trenches at Hanford despite concerns that contaminants could leak out. The trenches can be up to 1,100 feet long, 60 feet wide and 20 feet deep.

Hanford has nine active low-level radioactive waste burial sites, including a huge landfill in the center of the site.

Colleen Clark, a DOE spokeswoman, said all of the existing trenches at Hanford were compliant with existing disposal regulations.

Reporter Les Blumenthal can be reached in Washington, D.C., at 202-393-2228 or via e-mail at lblumenthal@mcclatchydc.com.

# Benton, Hanford debate alerts

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

Hanford and Benton County Emergency Services have made progress in negotiating what emergency conditions should prompt a Department of Energy alert.

The county wants to be alerted sooner than it has been in some previous Hanford incidents.

Brian Calvert, interim director of Benton County Emergency Services, briefed his board of directors Thursday on the talks.

Emergency officials in Benton, Franklin and Grant counties have been concerned

because DOE took 3½ hours to alert the counties' emergency dispatchers of a suspected airborne contamination release at the K Basins on Feb. 5. It was a false alarm.

DOE contended it followed proper procedures in classifying the emergency and notified the counties in an appropriate time. County officials contended it took much too long, especially because the neighboring Energy Northwest nuclear plant is required to notify them within 30 minutes of a suspected radiation release.

In April, Benton County Emergency Services and DOE began discussions on the matter.

A basic problem is that Hanford managers have lots of discretionary time before formally declaring an alert, which starts the clock on notifying outside emergency officials, Calvert said.

Right now, both sides are considering making an evacuation order or a "take cover" order as the threshold for beginning to notify emergency officials outside Hanford. A "take cover" order requires people to go indoors to guard against airborne contaminants.

Some security alarms and faulty air monitor readings can set off false evacuation signals, so DOE and the county are

discussing exceptions to the possible new criteria if DOE can confirm a false alarm within a specific time.

DOE and the county also are exploring giving the emergency services department the ability to trigger evacuation sirens along the Hanford Reach. That would involve setting up a secured computer link between Hanford and the emergency services building in Richland. The latest cost estimate on that link is \$20,000, an amount DOE still is reviewing.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-city-herald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-city-herald.com).

## Hanford set to test its waste glass against Mother Nature

■ Results may influence future of glassification efforts

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

Mix a controversial contaminant with some glass. Bury the glass in the dirt. Spray water into the dirt.

See what happens to the glass.

That's one way to figure out how Hanford's future glassified wastes might hold up over the next several thousand years.

In a few weeks, Pacific Northwest National Labora-

tory plans to bury some more glass in west-central Hanford as part of a multi-pronged effort to see how the stuff holds up against Mother Nature.

This research is to double-check computer simulations on how glassified, buried low-activity radioactive wastes will fare at Hanford.

And it may influence one of the ongoing controversies over Hanford's tank waste glassification efforts.

That's whether radioactive technetium 99 can be safely labeled as a low-activity waste instead of as a high-level radioactive waste. That classification is important because

classified low-activity wastes will be buried in central Hanford, while glassified high-level wastes will be eventually shipped to Nevada.

Right now, the Department of Energy wants to reclassify the tanks' technetium as a low-activity waste so it can dramatically cut costs at Hanford's waste glassification complex currently under construction. The state wants the technetium to remain as a high-level waste.

Technetium is controversial because it is highly radioactive, moves faster than most contaminants through groundwater, and takes more than

See **Glass**, Page B2

SUNDAY, MAY 25, 2003  
TRI-CITY HERALD

## Briefs

### CH2M Hill names Dodd new vice president

CH2M Hill Hanford Group has named Ryan Dodd, vice president of closure projects, giving him responsibility for accelerating the closure of Hanford's 177 large underground tank wastes.

Dodd previously served as the company's director of the storage and closure program and as director of the double-shell tanks and waste feed delivery operations.

He is a 1988 graduate of Washington State University with a degree in chemical engineering and has broad experience in tank farm operations.

### Fluor gives \$10,000 to Junior Achievement

Fluor donated \$10,000 last week to Junior Achievement of the Greater Tri-Cities.

It's the third year in a row Fluor has donated \$10,000 to the program, said Deb Bowen, executive director of Junior Achievement. The donation will be invested in stocks to benefit Junior Achievement's endowment fund. The Junior Achievement program expects to teach business and economics to more than 7,000 Tri-City students this year.

### Former PNNL director wins nuclear safety award

Lura Powell, former director of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, has won an award for her work to fight nuclear proliferation.

The National Nuclear Security Administration gave Powell its Distinguished Service Gold Medal this week in Washington, D.C.

The agency cited Powell's "energetic support and personal involvement" in supporting nuclear security programs in the former Soviet Union and at Hanford.

Powell was head of PNNL from 2000 to 2002. She is now president of consulting firm Lura J. Powell and Associates in Richland.

## Some downwinder cases may be heard

■ Spokane judge wants to select a few plaintiffs and take claims to trial

By Annette Cary  
Herald staff writer

SPOKANE — Hanford downwinder Dolores Hein may get her wish.

She's hoping her 82-year-old husband will live long enough to see his claim against past Hanford contractors settled one way or another.

Ralph Hein believes that Hanford emissions carried by the wind to his farm about 30 miles south of Spokane caused him to suffer thyroid cancer as a young man and later suffer bleeding in his head brought on by treatment for the malady.

Thursday, Judge William Fremming Nielsen said in U.S. District Court in Spokane that he wanted to move the 12-year-old case along by having attorneys pick out a few plaintiffs to take their claims to trial as soon as possible.



30 May 07

## ■ Reach committee says seeping water creating hiker hazards

By Anna King  
Herald staff writer

Warning signs should be posted in dangerous parts of the White Bluffs area to keep the public safe, members of the Hanford Reach National Monument advisory committee said Thursday.

The committee, which includes representatives of various interest groups helping develop a management plan for the monument, also decided to recommend the Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the monument, create a water management plan for the monument.

And the committee wants the Department of the Interior to assign another agency to study the sloughing of cliffs along the Reach into the Columbia River.

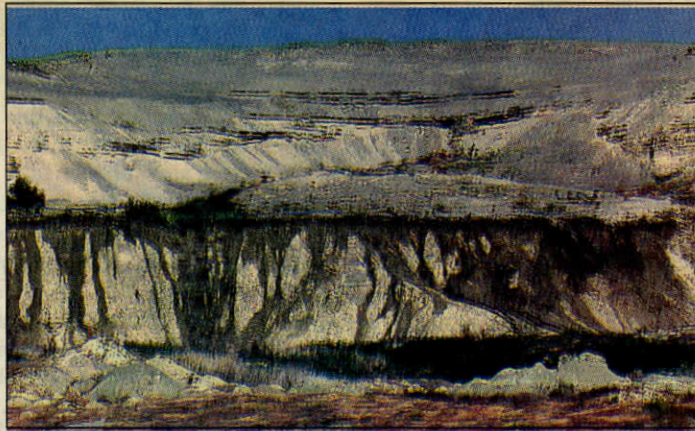
"People have been concerned about this for years — just nothing's happened," said committee member Gene Schreckhise, associate campus dean of Washington State University Tri-Cities.

Irrigation water seepage is thought to be the cause of the sloughing of the sandy bluffs. Probably the biggest concern about the sloughing is that it causes silt to cover prime salmon spawning areas.

But the sloughing also has opened deep crevasses that committee members said are hazardous. And the seeping water that is causing the slides also has produced heavy brush growth on the formerly barren white slopes.

"We used to call them the White Bluffs, now we can call it the green sloughs," Schreckhise said.

While the committee has no power to restrict farming or irrigation outside of the monument area, members are worried about



Herald file

Seeping water from nearby irrigation causes sloughing of the White Bluffs found along the Columbia River in the Hanford Reach National Monument. The slides can cover prime salmon spawning areas and produce heavy brush growth on formerly barren ground.

continued damage to the bluffs.

"I think there are ways you can still irrigate and still farm without having the waste water that causes the sloughing," Schreckhise said.

Committee members also are worried that people who enter

the White Bluffs area from nearby access roads could walk near the bluffs and get hurt or cause further damage.

"The bluffs are now becoming undercut, and if people were to walk out to the edge they could precipitate a landslide," said Ed

Rykiel, associate professor at WSU Tri-Cities. The committee agreed to ask the Fish and Wildlife Service to post warning signs in dangerous areas.

One committee member expressed concerns that new restrictions could infringe upon tribal access rights to parts of the monument.

"There are a lot of Native Americans that have ties to this area and are concerned about it," said Rex Buck, a member of the Wanapum tribe. "The tribes have to have access to perpetuate their cultures, to perpetuate their traditions and to perpetuate their beliefs."

The committee's next meeting will be from 12:30 to 4:30 p.m. June 24 at the WSU Tri-Cities Consolidated Information Center, 2770 University Drive, Richland, to discuss monument management alternatives.

■ Reporter Anna King can be reached at 582-1537 or via e-mail at [aking@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:aking@tri-cityherald.com).

# Judge sells General Electric stock to hear radiation case

By The Associated Press

SPOKANE — The federal judge who will hear a case involving massive radiation releases from the Hanford nuclear reservation has sold his stock in General Electric.

U.S. District Judge Frem Nielsen said Thursday that he sold his personal shares in GE to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest.

General Electric, which used to perform work at Hanford, is one of five major corporations named as defendants in three lawsuits now assigned to Nielsen.

Nielsen took over the case in April after U.S. District Judge Alan McDonald of Yakima failed to disclose that he owned land east of Hanford that he had certified as being radiation-free.

The lawsuits were filed on behalf of

thousands of people who lived downwind of Hanford during its decades of making plutonium for nuclear weapons. The plaintiffs contend their health was damaged by the releases.

The case is 12 years old and has about 6,000 plaintiffs. The defendants are five former Hanford contractors: DuPont, UNC Nuclear Industries, Atlantic Richfield Co., Rockwell International Corp. and GE.

In 1999, McDonald and his business partners bought an orchard at Ringold. McDonald certified to a bank that the land was free of any contamination, including radioactive particles.

Plaintiffs' attorney Tom Foulds of Seattle asked McDonald to step aside, and he agreed to that in March.

Within a few weeks, Nielsen is expected to consolidate the three lawsuits

into one and set a trial date, probably sometime next year.

Nielsen said in an interview with The Spokesman Review he sold 2,600 shares of GE stock that were in his personal stock portfolio. On the day he got the case, GE stock was selling for \$27.65 a share. That put the judge's liquidated GE holdings at approximately \$72,000.

Accelerating Hanford cleanup

Working with our community

Taking both responsibilities seriously

## Fluor Hanford offers major subcontracting opportunity to local businesses

Fluor Hanford and the CH2M HILL Hanford Group, acting under their respective contracts with the U. S. Department of Energy, recently issued a Request for Proposal seeking a local business to assume responsibility for Site Fabrication Services. Providing these services requires such capabilities as structural welding, machining, pipe welding, plasma cutting, sheet-metal work, electrical fabrication, and quality measuring to engineer and fabricate small lots of "one-of-a-kind" equipment. The move to shift this work to the private sector supports the Department's goal of accelerating cleanup of the Hanford Site.

Fluor Hanford will issue two, three-year contracts: one, to provide fabrication services to Fluor Hanford, the other to provide similar services to the CH2M HILL Hanford Group. Both contracts will include successive one-year options. The contracts, excluding the options, carry a total value of \$9 million.

Outsourcing the site's fabrication services supports Fluor Hanford's strategy of selectively moving discrete scopes of work off site to stimulate the growth of local businesses. Further, the intent is to have the "workforce follow the work," providing the successful bidder competent personnel who offer a solid foundation for entering other markets, while having the security of Hanford work. This approach should be good for business, and help provide current site workers viable, long-term employment that does not depend solely on Hanford.

As a result, the contract will stipulate that the successful bidder retain the bargaining-unit workforce currently providing fabrication services. Other provisions will require the new subcontractor to maintain a quality rating compatible with Hanford Site (nuclear industry) standards, adhere to all applicable federal and state occupational standards, and locate/operate the business within 25 miles of the Hanford Site.

Fluor Hanford is holding a pre-proposal conference for prospective bidders on Wednesday, June 4, 2003. To find out more, please access the Fluor Hanford Contracts web site at <http://www.hanford.gov/pmm/business/rfp.htm> (reference number: RFP-050103-DLS).

# Fluor Hanford

Thanks  
Thanks  
Thanks!

## The Bechtel Women's Group raised over \$55,000 at their 8th Annual Service Auction!

### Benefiting Children's Charities:

- Boys and Girls Club of Benton and Franklin Counties
- Three Rivers Carousel Foundation

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3 JUN 03

# Hanford criticized for delaying routine maintenance

## ■ *Federal study warns postponement could cause safety problems*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

Routine maintenance at Hanford has been postponed more and more in recent years, which could cause safety and environmental problems later, a federal study has found.

The Department of Energy's Inspector General's office found

Hanford accumulated \$186 million in postponed routine, non-nuclear maintenance in 2002. That compared with \$21 million in postponed maintenance in 1998, said the report.

The report criticized Hanford officials for not adequately coordinating and prioritizing maintenance of roads, electrical utilities, buildings and water and sewer lines.

However, DOE's Richland office is in its first year of a new coordinated infrastructure maintenance approach, said Steve

Burnum, a team leader in DOE's site services division at Hanford.

The Inspector General's report noted some maintenance-related troubles including:

■ Repairs being postponed on deteriorating instruments and equipment in two heavily used central Hanford analytical labs. Burnum said safety-related repairs are up to date, and that the postponed maintenance is on cleanup-oriented equipment.

■ A water line broke near the S Tank Farm in the 200 West Area in July 2002, spilling about

1.7 million gallons of water into the ground. Seeping water from leaks speeds the flow of radioactive and chemical contaminants into the aquifer.

■ An unoccupied trailer caught fire next to the highly radioactive 233-S former plutonium processing building in 2001. The cause was lack of preventive maintenance on a heater in the trailer.

Burnum said none of the postponed maintenance will lead to safety problems to people or to the environment. Safety-related maintenance has the

top priority, he said.

Infrastructure maintenance at Hanford usually gets \$35 million to \$45 million annually, which includes some noninfrastructure expenses such as firefighting equipment.

Burnum said infrastructure maintenance is operating with the lowest practical budget as DOE tries to balance those needs with adequate funding for environmental cleanup.

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# K Basins work cruising along

4 June 03

■ *Fluor plans to finish  
spent fuel removal  
ahead of schedule*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford plans to speed up its K Basins cleanup work, hoping to finish removing spent nuclear fuel from the water-filled basins four months ahead of schedule.

At the same time, the company reports it is trying to accelerate

cleanup work at the Plutonium Finishing Plant and hopes to beat deadlines for that job.

But Dave Van Leuven, Fluor Hanford's president, also said Tuesday that the company is five months past a deadline to begin removal of radioactive sludge from the K East Basin. He said that work has been delayed while Fluor concentrated on the other jobs.

The K Basins and PFP are considered Hanford's No. 2 and

See **K Basins**, Page A2

654W 03

# Senate approves state loan from waste cleanup funds

By Chris Mulick

Herald Olympia bureau

OLYMPIA — The state Senate approved a bill Thursday evening that will allow the transfer of \$13.8 million from a fund set up to pay for cleanup activities at a commercial low-level radioactive waste site in central Hanford.

The money will be used to help plug the state's \$2.6 billion deficit and is scheduled to be repaid to the site closure account in annual payments between 2008 and 2033. Senate Bill 6087 passed the Senate 35-13.

Sen. Adam Kline, D-Seattle, opposed the bill, arguing there's no guarantee the money will be repaid.

"We might pay it back," he said. "The fact is we can't commit a future Legislature to pay this back. I can't promise my

constituents this money really is going to be there."

Sen. Pat Hale, R-Kennewick, urged her colleagues not to confuse the waste with high-level federal wastes generated at Hanford as part of its wartime missions to develop nuclear weapons.

The private U.S. Ecology site, which the company operates for the state Department of Health, is home to various commercial wastes with low levels of radioactive contamination from such places as hospitals and universities in 11 states.

"There's really no risk here in borrowing from that account," Hale said.

After the transfer, the closure fund will have \$18.6 million left.

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## ■ *Initiative would ban Hanford from accepting wastes from other states*

**By the Herald staff**

Three environmental groups plan to launch a petition drive Monday to put shipment of radioactive wastes to Hanford to a public vote.

Heart of America Northwest, the Government Accountability Project and Environmental Media Services West have scheduled a news conference in Olympia to announce the drive to collect enough signatures to put the issue on the 2004 ballot.

The initiative would seek a state law to ban Hanford from accepting transuranic wastes, low-level radioactive wastes and mixed radioactive and chemical wastes from other states. Hanford accepts some off-site low-level wastes for permanent burial, while temporarily storing and processing other sites' transuranic wastes for eventual shipment to New Mexico.

The state and four watchdog groups, including GAP and Heart of America,

See **Hanford**, Page B5



5 JUN 03

## **New PNNL director to speak at luncheon**

Len Peters, the new director of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, will speak at noon Tuesday at the Alliance of Chambers luncheon at the Pasco Red Lion.

Peters will discuss the future of the lab, the community and the region. It's one of the first chances the public has had to meet him since he began work April 1 at the Department of Energy's national lab.

Before coming to the Tri-Cities, he managed the diverse \$230 million research program at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. The program ranges from biotechnology and materials to transportation and information technology.

Reservations should be made by Friday by calling 946-1651. Cost is \$20.

6 JUN 03

## ■ *Yakamas say restoration of natural resources being neglected in nuclear cleanup*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The Yakama Nation sent a notice Thursday to the Department of Energy that it intends to sue the federal agency in 60 days over how Hanford's cleanup is conducted.

Specifically, the Yakamas believe DOE, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and other federal agencies are neglecting the restoration of natural resources as it

tackles nuclear cleanup.

The 60-day notice is a legal requirement before the Yakamas can file a lawsuit in federal court. The threatened lawsuit will target DOE and the Department of Defense as defendants because they and their predecessors actually ran Hanford.

The lawsuit will seek to force the federal government to plan, pay for and restore natural resources that were damaged by Hanford's decades of plutonium production, the accompanying radioactive and chemical discharges, and their subsequent oozing to the Columbia River.

The Yakama Nation has tried to get DOE and the EPA to tackle restoring natural habitat for animals, insects and fish simultaneously with the site's nuclear

cleanup, said Tom Zeilman, an attorney for the Yakamas.

The Yakama Nation believes its concerns on this subject have fallen on deaf federal ears.

"If DOE and EPA do not restore the salmon and other natural resources as part of their cleanup, the damages in this lawsuit could reach hundreds of millions or billions of dollars. One way or another, the Yakama Nation is committed to restoring the resources by the operations at Hanford," said Ross Sockzehigh, Yakama Tribal Council Chairman, in a written statement.

DOE and EPA officials in Washington, D.C., could not be reached for comment late Thursday afternoon.

The Yakama Nation is a collection of bands, which along with other Eastern Washington tribes, used today's Hanford as a crossroads in their annual hunting, gathering and fishing migrations prior to the 20th century.

Several treaties signed in 1855 guarantee the Yakamas and other tribes access to Hanford, including its Columbia River segment, to conduct traditional hunting, fishing and gathering activities. The Yakamas contend Hanford's pollution has harmed their traditional fishing areas.

The Yakamas base their threatened lawsuit on the federal Superfund law, which requires that natural resources damages be

See **Yakama**, Page B2

## HAB rebukes waste study

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The Hanford Advisory Board believes improvements are needed in a massive Hanford environmental impact study on dealing with solid wastes.

Meanwhile, the watchdog organization, Heart of America Northwest, has charged that Battelle has a conflict of interest in helping prepare that study, and wants a Department of Energy inspector general's investigation into the matter.

Both stances emerged late last week at HAB's meeting in Richland.

Hanford's solid waste environmental impact study covers the effects of various options to deal with the site's low-level radioactive wastes, transuranic wastes, mixed chemical and radioactive wastes, glassified or otherwise treated low-activity radioactive tank wastes, radioactive used melters, and contaminated ground water.

DOE unveiled a draft study in April 2002, which was universally criticized for being too skimpy.

A second revision was released two months ago, with Hanford's various interests studying it since.

Thursday, the HAB considered requesting that DOE withdraw the entire study and do it a third time, believing the second revision left out lots of factors. Meanwhile, Washington's Department of Ecology and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said Thursday that they did not want to reject the second revision, although they wanted to see it improved.

On Friday, the HAB adopted the state's and EPA's lead — withdrawing a call to reject the study, but also listed many items to add to the existing study report.

"This makes it clear that the board doesn't want to be an obstructionist," said HAB member Susan Leckband, representing Hanford's nonunion members.

The board sent a memo to DOE on Friday that said the HAB believes the revised environmental impact study needs more analyses on residual wastes to be left in Hanford's tanks, leaked tank wastes, chemical and transuranic wastes in the low-level radioactive waste burial grounds, the K Basins' sludges and the treated nonglassified low-

activity tank wastes that will be buried at Hanford.

The memo also contended the revised environmental impact study shortchanged the state's authority on ground water and chemical contaminants.

A third revision of the environmental impact study's report is expected about the third week of July, with DOE's recommendations on which options to pursue on each type of wastes. DOE hopes to adopt those recommendations by late August.

Meanwhile, Gerald Pollet, director of Heart of America Northwest, told board members about a letter his organization sent last week to DOE's Inspector General's office.

The letter charges that Battelle, which did the majority of the preparation and analytical work for DOE's environmental impact study, has a conflict of interest because it is shipping transuranic wastes from its site near Columbus, Ohio, to Hanford.

"This goes to the credibility of everything we've talked about (regarding the solid waste environmental impact study)," Pollet said.

That Battelle waste is the subject of three lawsuits the state, DOE, Heart of America and other environmental groups have filed against each other in federal court. All three suits address whether the state or DOE should have the final authority over Battelle's and other transuranic wastes arriving, leaving or currently buried at Hanford.

However, DOE and Battelle officials disagree with Heart of America's charge of a conflict of interest.

They said the transuranic wastes being shipped from Battelle's Columbus site are federal wastes, not Battelle wastes, and that Battelle gains nothing financially from those shipments. And they said that DOE, not Battelle, makes the final decisions regarding the environmental impact study.

Pollet contended that Battelle lied in signing a statement in the study's report, saying it did not have a conflict of interest on this matter. DOE and Battelle contended Battelle properly filled out all the appropriate potential conflict-of-interest documentation.

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# Judge unseals radiation release report

**By the Herald staff and The Associated Press**

SPOKANE — A 9-year-old report that contended radiation releases from the Hanford nuclear reservation might have been underestimated has been unsealed by a federal judge.

The report looked at the Hanford Environmental Dose Reconstruction project, which estimated how much and what types of airborne radiation might have

been carried downwind from Hanford.

Since then the dose reconstruction project has been completed and changes made.

The report critical of the project was prepared by Thomas Pigford. The nuclear engineer was picked as a neutral scientific expert to sort through some of the complex issues in a suit brought by those who lived downwind of Hanford while it was producing plutonium. Parts of the report

had earlier been leaked to the media.

Defense attorney Kevin Van Wart of Chicago said the Pigford report was based on summary reports of the dose reconstruction project.

U.S. District Judge Alan McDonald sealed the report in 1994, but U.S. District Judge William Fremming Nielsen unsealed the report after he took over the case in April.

"I'm not sure why it was sealed in the

first place," Nielsen said at a conference on the case last week. He asked lawyers for both sides whether there was any reason to keep the Pigford report under seal. Nobody objected to unsealing it.

The Hanford case was filed in 1991 but had been stalled on an appeal. A year ago, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed a 1998 ruling by McDonald that rejected the claims of most of the plaintiffs, and ordered a trial.

9 JUN 03  
■ *1,938 strontium, cesium capsules must be moved to T Plant by Sept. 28, 2006*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford hopes to have a contract in place by Aug. 25 to tackle Hanford's densest concentration of radioactivity.

That concentration is 1,938 capsules of strontium and cesium stored in several water-filled pools inside a building at B Plant in central Hanford. Overall, those 20-inch-long, 2½-inch-diameter capsules contain 126 million curies of radioactivity.

By comparison, central Hanford's 53

million gallons of tank wastes, scattered across 177 underground tanks, hold 190 million curies.

Late last week, Dale McKenney, Fluor's acting director for waste management projects, briefed the Hanford Advisory Board on how the capsules will be moved to a dry storage area inside Hanford's T Plant.

Fluor has issued a request for proposals on the project. June 25 is the deadline for proposals. Fluor has set an Aug. 25 deadline to select the subcontractor.

The first capsules are supposed to be moved by Oct. 3, 2005, and all capsules are supposed to be in T Plant by Sept. 28, 2006, which is two years ahead of the original schedule.

The details and costs of moving the capsules are open-ended subjects to be

covered in the bids submitted.

About a dozen companies expressed interest in the project a few months ago, McKenney said.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Hanford removed some highly radioactive strontium and cesium from the tank wastes and shipped 700 capsules of that material across the nation for medical purposes. But one capsule leaked, and all 700 were recalled to Hanford by 1995.

The recalled capsules, plus those that never left Hanford, totaled 1,938.

These are stored in pools because the water acts as a radiation shield, while also cooling the hot cesium and strontium.

The Department of Energy originally planned to glassify the strontium and cesium sometime after 2012 in the tank waste glassification complex currently

under construction.

But the radioactivity of the cesium and strontium will decay to benign levels in just a few hundred years, much less than the required 10,000-year lifespan of Hanford's future waste-holding glass.

So DOE wants to insert the capsules in slightly bigger shielded canisters that are designed to dissipate the heat. Then the canisters are to be moved to a dry area in T Plant to remove the risk of the indoor pools' springing leaks with contaminated water seeping into the ground.

Eventually, DOE plans to send those canisters to a proposed permanent storage site inside Yucca Mountain, Nev.

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# Initiative filed to halt Hanford shipments

■ *Measure set for 2004 ballot aims to keep other states' waste out of Washington*

By Chris Mulick

Herald Olympia bureau

OLYMPIA — Environmental watchdog groups filed an initiative to the Legislature on Monday hoping to halt shipments of nuclear waste to Hanford.

If backers collect 197,000 valid signatures by the end of the year, the Legislature would be forced to approve the measure next year or put it on the November 2004 ballot.

Supporters, which include Heart of America Northwest, fear without the initiative Hanford will become a national dump for the country's nuclear waste.

"Enough is enough," said Tom Carpenter of the Government Accountability Project. "Washington has done its share."

Spokesmen in DOE's Washington, D.C., office did not return phone calls Monday seeking comment.

The Ploughshares Fund, a San Francisco-based advocacy group seeking to eliminate weapons of war, has given the measure an initial boost by offering \$100,000 to support it.

The initiative would prevent the state from granting permits to build new trenches and waste facilities to store waste

from other states. The federal government hopes to send various wastes to Hanford for packaging before shipping them to New Mexico for permanent disposal.

The state could resume accepting wastes from other states once the federal government's cleanup mission is complete at Hanford.

"Every child learns in kindergarten you clean up your mess before you create a new one," said Gerald Pollet, director of Heart of America.

The state and federal government already have filed lawsuits against each other this year over what to do with so-called transuranic wastes — junk laced with highly radioactive materials such as

plutonium and neptunium. Hanford has about 75,000 barrels of buried transuranic wastes and another 9,000 barrels stored above ground.

The Yakama Nation also has served notice that it intends to sue the federal government for neglecting to restore natural habitat destroyed during Hanford's plutonium production days.

Backers of the initiative say the measure would give the state another legal tool to prevent further shipments to Hanford.

"We think this initiative would help short-circuit a lot of those lawsuits," Carpenter said.

Initiative supporters assume the Legislature would send it to the ballot rather

than approve it if enough signatures are collected.

Kennewick Sen. Pat Hale, chairwoman of the Senate Republican Caucus, said state law isn't as murky as the initiative sponsors say.

"The state has clear regulatory authority over the site," she said. "It think it's totally unnecessary."

Pollet said organizers will not use paid signature gatherers, relying entirely on volunteers. A broad-based political committee will be formed later this year to push the measure, he said.

■ Reporter Chris Mulick can be reached at 360-753-0862 or via e-mail at [cmulick@tricityherald.com](mailto:cmulick@tricityherald.com).

# Environmental impact study falls

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

Washington's Department of Ecology believes a massive Hanford solid waste environmental impact study falls significantly short of what it should address.

If the Department of Energy does not address those perceived shortcomings with this massive study, the state contends future studies will be needed to fill in the gaps.

However, DOE believes the draft solid waste environmental impact study sufficiently meets

what it legally needs, said DOE spokeswoman Colleen Clark.

But DOE will look at the state's comments and will likely use them to improve the study's final draft report expected in August, Clark said. That August draft will likely include recommendations on how Hanford should deal with waste at the site. Some of this waste includes the site's low-level radioactive wastes, transuranic wastes, mixed chemical and radioactive wastes, glassified or otherwise treated low-activity radioactive tank wastes, radioac-

tive used melters and contaminated ground water.

DOE expects to decide whether to adopt those recommendations in September.

On Wednesday, the state sent its comments to DOE about a second revision of this environmental impact study report, which was released in April. That revision follows an April 2002 draft that Hanford interests, including the state, universally rejected as too skimpy.

In a Wednesday news release, Tom Fitzsimmons, director of the

state Ecology Department, said: "This version is definitely an improvement over the document (DOE) released (in 2002), but it still doesn't adequately analyze all of the potential environmental consequences necessary to satisfy our state cleanup requirements."

The state's stance mirrors the position taken last week by the Hanford Advisory Board.

The state's concerns include:

■ The study does not adequately analyze the effects of transporting radioactive wastes from other DOE sites to Hanford.

# ulity, state says

■ The predictions are incomplete on the amounts of waste to be treated, stored and disposed at Hanford.

■ The analyses on long-range spreading of contaminated ground water is based on incomplete information.

■ Not enough study has been

done on how to fix environmental damages from contaminated ground water.

■ More study is needed on environmental risk from previously disposed wastes.

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13 JUN 03

# Glassification plant's pipeline

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

Hanford has the pipelines ready to transfer radioactive wastes to its glassification complex.

Now, Hanford just needs the glassification complex to pump the wastes to.

On Thursday, Hanford officials held a ceremonial "ground unbreaking," shoveling dirt back into an already dug-out hole in the 200 East Area.

That kick-started CH2M Hanford Group to bury the capped ends of three long stainless steel pipes stretching from

two tank farms to a spot about 75 yards from the radioactive tank waste pretreatment plant under construction.

When the pretreatment plant is nearing completion later this decade, Bechtel National will uncover those pipe ends to connect them to the building that will begin the process to turn the tank wastes into glass.

CH2M Hill subcontractors Apollo Inc. and HiLine Engineering provided and installed 6,100 feet of underground pipes from the tank farms to a baseball's throw of the glassification complex.

They did the work for about \$3 million — \$2 million below Hanford's original forecast.

Two pipelines begin at the AP Tank Farm, and one begins at the AN Tank Farm as a backup route. A tank farm is a cluster of underground waste tanks.

So the AN and AP tank farms will be the jump-off points to send possibly 36 million of Hanford's 53 million gallons of Hanford's tank wastes to the glassification complex.

The pipes are double-shelled as a safety precaution against leaks. The inner pipes



Herald/Paul T. Erickson

Keith Qunell, right, with the Washington State Patrol and Robert Warren with the Oregon Department of Transportation, measure the radiation levels Thursday of containers holding the 1,000th 55-gallon drum of transuranic waste shipped from Hanford. The shipment will be trucked to the Waste Isolation Pilot Project in New Mexico.

# 1,000th drum of waste leaves Hanford

By Cara Fitzpatrick

Herald staff writer

When Dusty Gill drives by, people can't help but stare.

The 10-foot-tall stainless steel cylinders riding on the back of his big rig are enough by themselves to catch the attention of pedestrians and drivers. But the neon yellow radioactive material symbols painted below them really seal the deal.

"Yeah, I get a lot of looks," Gill said Thursday, chuckling.

Though the Nevada man often finds himself drawing attention at truck stops and red lights, most people never realize they are traveling alongside barrels of transuranic waste.

"You don't talk about what you're hauling. Sometimes I say it's just

garbage," he said, adding that heightened security requirements also prohibit him from discussing his cargo.

But for the trip that Gill and his driving partner, Brian Paterson, left on Thursday, a little publicity was OK. That's because the truckers have the distinction of carrying the 1,000th drum of waste to go from the Hanford site to the Waste Isolation Pilot Project in southern New Mexico.

The trip, which should take about four days and will cover 1,800 miles and six states, is a sign that Hanford's efforts to ship transuranic wastes to the WIPP storage facility are accelerating.

"The first 1,000 are always the hardest," said Rick Dunn, transuranic wastes program manager for Fluor Hanford.

Now that the process of preparing the

barrels is becoming routine, Dunn said, shipments should occur more frequently.

The two 10-foot-tall containers, or TRUPACTs, the truck carries each hold 14 drums with 55 gallons of transuranic waste inside. They are the 14th shipment to leave Hanford this year.

That's a big improvement compared with past years.

Todd Shrader, the Department of Energy's transuranic wastes program manager, said there were only three shipments in 2002 and five in both 2000 and 2001. The goal is to send eight shipments a month. A typical load contains about 35 drums.

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19 JUL 03

# CH2M Hill pumps 18,000 gallons of waste from vault

■ *Ahead of Sept. 30  
Tri-Party Agreement  
deadline for removal*

**By the Herald staff**

CH2M Hill Hanford Group recently finished pumping 18,000 gallons of radioactive and chemical wastes from a 100-foot-long concrete vault in central Hanford.

The wastes, which were sent to Hanford's giant underground double-shell tanks, came from four much smaller tanks inside 244-AR Vault just north of the PUREX plant in the 200 East Area. The four tanks originally held about 19,000 gallons of wastes.

The Tri-Party Agreement set a

Sept. 30 deadline to remove most of the vault's wastes, install monitors in the four tanks and cut and plug all lines and drains leading into and out of the vault. Only the line cutting and plugging remains to be done.

Then CH2M Hill and the Department of Energy will study the remaining few inches of sludges to see how to deal with them before formally "closing" the vault. Actions on the remaining sludges and on "closing" the vault are not covered by the Tri-Party Agreement deadline, and will be tackled later.

From 1968 to the early 1990s, 244 -AR Vault was a midway stop in sending wastes from the now-closed PUREX and B plants to the site's underground tanks.

17 JUN 03

## **PNNL manager named DOE Energy Champion**

Mike Moran, the facility manager for Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, has been named an Energy Champion by the Department of Energy.

The national award recognizes leadership in new programs to promote energy conservation, reduce energy consumption and save taxpayer money.

Work by Moran's team has added up to energy savings of \$500,000 annually, according to the lab. He has started a competition among lab building staffs to reduce energy consumption, allowed energy conservation technologies to be tested in lab buildings and negotiated a contract to buy green power produced by a nearby wind farm.

17 JUL 03  
■ *Hanford glassification project gets help from crane that can lift up to 600 tons*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The big silver tank weighed 60 tons.

And the big blue crane lifted it off a barge, rotated 180 degrees and gently lowered the tank onto a flatbed truck.

Piece of cake.

The crane can handle 10 times the tank's weight.

In fact, the new 600-ton crane in northern Richland is the strongest waterside lift crane on the West Coast, out-muscling some waterborne harbor cranes in Seattle and San Francisco Bay capable of lifting 400- to 500-plus tons.

Monday marked the first time that a new Lampson International crane, with a 200-foot-long boom, removed two super-heavy Hanford tanks from a Columbia River barge at the Port of Benton's northernmost dock.

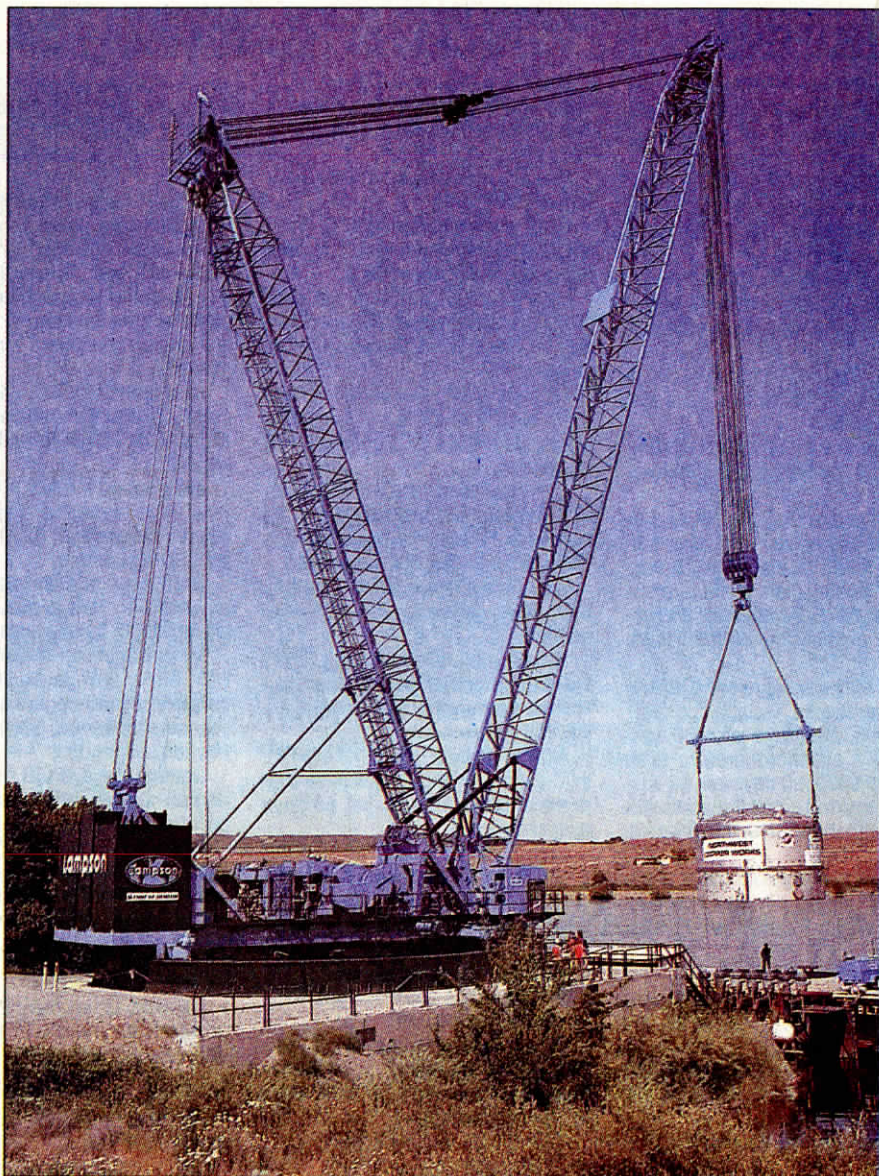
Lampson International expects to move about 70 ultra-heavy items up the Columbia River, unload them with the new crane and transport them to the central Hanford construction site of the tank waste glassification complex over the next 18 to 24 months, said company President Bill Lampson.

"Having access to a heavy-lift facility like this is an asset to the project," said Jim Henschel, manager of Bechtel National's glassification project.

Until now, super-heavy pieces of Hanford equipment were unloaded off barges a couple of hundred yards downriver, where Lampson International has a crane capable of lifting 150 tons.

Several months ago, Lampson International approached the Port of Benton and other local authorities about widening and reinforcing the most-upstream dock and installing the big crane on it to handle massive pieces of equipment for the glassification project's construction. The crane is mounted on a ring built into the dock, so the boom can rotate 360 degrees.

After getting the go-ahead, it took Lampson International and the Port of Benton 90 days to obtain the appropriate permits, reinforce the dock, widen it from 40 feet across to about 80 feet across, and assemble the crane on it.



Herald/Richard Dickin

A new Lampson International crane lifts a 60-ton container off a barge on the Columbia River on Monday afternoon. The 600-ton crane, the strongest waterside lift crane on the West Coast, is to be used to lift 70 extra-heavy items that are destined for the Hanford glassification complex over the next 18 to 24 months.

Lampson spent about \$3.5 million to upgrade the dock and assemble the crane, hoping to recoup a third to half of that investment with what Bechtel pays it to transport the 70 pieces of equipment within the next two years, Lampson said.

Lampson International hopes to attract nonglassification business with the new crane and to tackle future glassification plant business after 2005.

The steel tanks unloaded Monday were

each 24 feet in diameter and 19 feet tall. They will collect and store radioactive wastes draining from a laboratory and various drainage systems in the building being constructed to separate high-level radioactive wastes and low-activity wastes. They are scheduled to be installed inside the pre-treatment building in September.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).

# Next step taken in crafting Reach plan

**By Anna King**

Herald staff writer

Tense grins, big sighs and applause celebrated Thursday's completion of a more detailed plan for managing the Hanford Reach National Monument.

For three long days, people interested in the monument gathered at the Washington State University Tri-Cities in Richland to hash out the details of the Reach's future.

Tribal members, educators, horsemen and others met in small groups to help craft a plan for public access while still protecting sensitive plants and animals.

"This has blown me away, and I'm not a process person," said Greg Hughes, the project leader from the Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Just about every stakeholder that has an interest in the Reach (was here), from public entities to private landowners," Hughes said. "There is a wealth of knowledge and experience that they added to this."

This was the third step toward finishing the management plan. The group already has built the framework of the plan, determining first their vision of what the monument should be and then the goals for accomplishing that. Opinions often clashed over whether the Reach plan should emphasize wildlife preservation, public education or recreation.

On Thursday, Hughes reminded the group that no one would get everything they wanted but he praised their hard work and compromises.

The objectives still must go through many changes before they are adopted.

"This isn't the end — there is lots more," said Ron Crouse, spokesman for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The wildlife agency will review the objectives and present the next draft to the Reach monument's federal advisory committee, which will make the final decision.

What was accomplished Thursday was no small feat, Hughes said.

## ■ *Decision expected in a few weeks on DOE request to reclassify high-level wastes*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

BOISE — A federal judge expects to decide in a few weeks whether the Department of Energy can reclassify some high-level radioactive wastes as less dangerous so the material can be left in underground tanks.

U.S. District Court Judge B. Lynn Winmill heard arguments on the issue Friday from DOE and a coalition of environmental groups and tribes.

The Idaho-based Snake River Alliance, the Washington, D.C.-based Natural Resources Defense Council, the Yakama Indian Nation and the Shoshone-Bannock tribe sued last year to prevent the federal government from reclassifying the tank wastes to speed up nuclear cleanup.

The states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and South Carolina have sided with the environmental groups because they don't want DOE to have broad waste reclassification powers.

DOE contends since it has not actually tried to reclassify any wastes, that the lawsuit is premature, involving hypothetical future scenarios.

The litigation focuses on DOE's sites at Hanford, Savannah River, S.C., and the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory.

Hanford has 53 million gallons of radioactive wastes in 177 underground tanks. Savannah River has 34 million gallons and INEEL has 900,000 gallons.

DOE is making a nationwide push to speed up nuclear cleanup. That has prompted some caution among state regulators and environmental groups about the possibility of DOE taking shortcuts.

Attorney Geoffrey Fettus, representing the National Resources Defense Council, argued Friday that the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 requires all high-level

radioactive wastes eventually go to some type of permanent federal or commercial storage site.

Reclassifying high-level wastes so they can remain in the tanks goes against Congress' intent, he said.

"It's high-level wastes when it was produced. It was high-level wastes when it was poured into the tanks and high-level wastes until DOE magically designated it as something else," Fettus said.

Fettus claimed DOE already violated the law when it formally "closed" two tanks at Savannah River after keeping a small amount of wastes inside, mixed with a cementlike grout.

However, DOE attorney Barry Weiner argued, "The plaintiffs have made a lot of allegations of what could happen, but not on what actually happened."

He argued DOE would not violate the law if it reclassified wastes after treatment. Mixing tank wastes with grout or another cementlike substance is treating the wastes, he argued, and that would also dilute the concentration of radionuclides

within those wastes.

He also said the grouting of the Savannah River wastes fell under a separate DOE order outside the scope of the reclassification issue.

The judge asked what would happen if tank wastes are mixed with grout, and then are found to be radioactive enough to still be high-level wastes.

Weiner replied, "You can still remove the grout if needed."

At Hanford, the state and DOE already are feuding over what actions DOE can take — especially on tank waste issues — without state approval.

The state already is vehemently protesting DOE's decision to treat high-level radioactive technetium in tank wastes as a low-activity waste.

And in the next one or two years, the state and DOE plan to negotiate what "closure" means in cleaning up 26 Hanford tanks by 2006.

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# Incidents rattle Hanford tank farm

26 JUN 03  
■ *6 workers contaminated:  
bomb threat made at farm*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

Six Hanford employees tested positive for radiation contamination on their faces or in their noses after removing equipment from a valve pit Wednesday near the entrance to the AW tank farm.

Later in the day in an apparently unrelated incident, a bomb threat was made to an administrative building near the same

tank farm in the 200 East Area of central Hanford.

The farm is one of 18 groups of underground tanks holding high-level radioactive waste from past plutonium production at the site.

Tank farm workers were removing a jumper, a heavy-duty stainless steel hose, from a valve pit in late morning when the contamination occurred, said DOE spokeswoman Andrea Powell.

The jumper was used to transfer tank wastes at one time and was no longer in use, but had been left at the bottom of the pit. Typically, long tools are used to reach

down into the concrete valve pits to connect the hoses.

As workers were removing the hose from the pit, a brown powder fell out of it and to the floor of the pit, Powell said.

Work was stopped, and water was used to wash away contamination found on people.

The six workers also were taken for whole-body radiation counts out of concern they could have inhaled contaminated particles.

Results from the whole-body counts should be available today.

Wednesday afternoon, several hours

after the contamination incident, the anonymous bomb threat was called in to an administration building near the AW tank farm.

About 200 employees were evacuated from that building and nearby buildings and work areas.

The Hanford Patrol searched for a bomb and also brought in dogs to search. They concluded the search about 4:30 p.m. without finding anything suspicious, Powell said.

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## **PNNL wins business environmental award**

22 JUN 03

Pacific Northwest National Laboratory has won an environmental award from the Association of Washington Business for conserving water and using renewable energy last year.

The Environmental Excellence Award noted PNNL's accomplishments, including buying 13.7 percent of its energy from renewable sources, conserving 114 million gallons of water, and working with the Bonneville Power Administration to cut down on electricity use, the state business association reported. PNNL was one of seven groups to win the award in a Seattle ceremony this week.

26 JUN 03

# Most partners agree on site

**By Nathan Isaacs**

Herald staff writer

Most partners in Richland's proposed Hanford Reach Interpretive Center have agreed they prefer a Columbia Point South site location, but that may not be acceptable to Mid-Columbia tribes.

The partners on Monday signed a letter to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation stating their desire to locate the project along the Columbia River, on the east side of the Columbia Point South property.

Columbia Point South is south of Interstate 182 and east of Highway 240. The Columbia and Yakima rivers complete its border.

See **Partners**, Page B2

26 JUN 03

# Hanford tank cleanup plan hits pay dirt

■ *Technology uses soil to turn nuclear waste into glass blocks*

By **Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

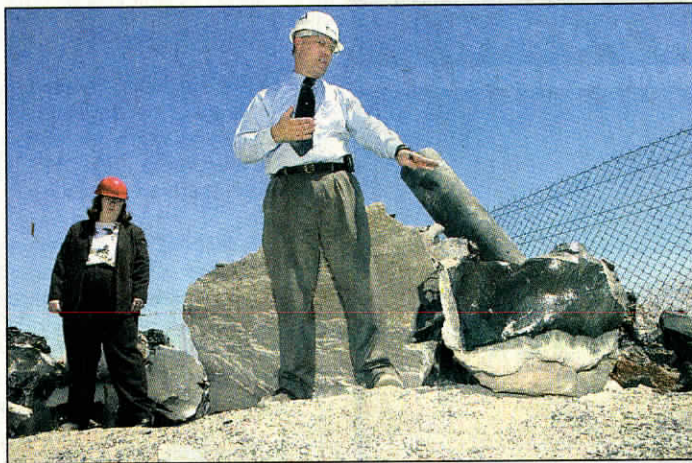
Hanford officials have successfully tested a cleanup agent that's dirt cheap at the site where price tags often run into the millions.

In fact, it is dirt.

Hanford officials have melted a combination of soil and simulated tank waste into a large block of shiny black glass.

It's the product of the first full-scale field test of one of the three supplemental technologies being considered for treating some of the low-activity nuclear waste stored in underground tanks at Hanford.

The \$5.7 billion vitrification plant under construction at Hanford cannot process by a 2028



Herald/Paul T. Erickson

Richard Raymond, director of treatment and disposal at CH2M Hill Hanford Group, describes the bulk vitrification process of low level waste Tuesday at a test site north of Richland near the HAMMER facility. Raymond is standing next to a pile of nonradioactive test product. At left is Billie Mauss, the Department of Energy's Office of River Protection manager for supplemental technologies.

deadline all the 53 million gallons of waste generated by 50 years of production of plutonium for nuclear weapons.

So DOE is testing alternative

technologies to see if they can safely contain some of the low-activity waste.

The bulk vitrification process turns waste into a glasslike sub-

stance much like nature does.

"Volcanic glass is very durable," said Richard Raymond, director of treatment and disposal at CH2M Hill Hanford Group, which is evaluating various technologies for the Department of Energy.

"It's been around for millions of years so there is some reason to believe if we make glass at the same temperature out of the same material, it will be around for millions of years, too," he said.

But when Hanford makes glass, it plans to mix in radioactive waste contaminated with chemicals to immobilize the waste.

AMEC Earth & Environmental Inc., a contractor for the project, has mixed soil from near the north Richland test site with dry simulated tank wastes. Tests are not being done with radioactive material. The soil from the

See **Dirt**, Page B2

# Bechtel removes contaminated soil ahead of schedule

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

Bechtel Hanford recently completed a major project to remove contaminated soil 17 months ahead of schedule.

In late May, Bechtel finished moving 827,492 tons of contaminated dirt and 2,196 yards of contaminated pipes from the area around F Reactor to a huge central Hanford landfill. The Tri-Party Agreement deadline to complete that

work is Oct. 29, 2004.

That tonnage covers most of the contaminated soil around F Reactor, said Tom Kisenwether of Bechtel, who oversees the overall effort.

F Reactor produced plutonium at Hanford from 1945 to 1965. The soil removal project targeted 16 sites where ash and liquid wastes were dumped, used reactor water was held for cooling and piping systems were located.

Bechtel cleaned up the 16 sites, plus 14 nearby smaller sites that were not on the Tri-Party Agreement schedule.

Kisenwether said Bechtel saved several months of digging up soil because ground-penetrating probes found that much of one ash pit did not have to be cleaned out.

Also, soil removal of the areas surrounding H, F, K East and K West Reactors was merged into one project. All were

tackled simultaneously. Consequently, whenever Bechtel got stalled at one site, it could shift workers to another, keeping overall momentum going, he said.

The soil removal work at H and F Reactors is done, and Bechtel is concentrating ahead of schedule on the area around the two K Reactors. The deadline to begin the K East and K West soil removal is Aug. 1.

The K Reactors work is to be com-

pleted by December 2012. That's because it will fall under the pending Columbia River corridor cleanup contract that is to replace Bechtel's current contract soon. Bechtel is appealing the Department of Energy's decision to award the new contract to Washington Closure Co.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).

## ■ *3 Hanford workers inhaled small amounts of radioactive cesium*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

A radioactive powder inhaled by three Hanford tank farm employees was likely not identified as a potential hazard prior to Wednesday's incident.

At a Thursday news conference, CH2M Hill official Susan Eberlein believed the radioactive cesium powder inside a long-abandoned jumper hose was not identified as a hazard before it was moved, releasing a "little poof ... of sooty dust material" that contaminated nearby Hanford workers.

However, Eberlein, CH2M Hill's vice president for environmental safety, health and quality assurance, added that needed to be verified.

After checking 12 workers, Hanford experts concluded three inhaled small amounts of radioactive cesium. One works for Fluor Hanford and the other two work for CH2M Hill.

Cesium emits gamma radiation, which can penetrate skin and body tissue and breaks down cells. It is soluble in water and can be flushed from the body.

Another CH2M Hill worker was found with an elevated level of radioactive cobalt, which is either a false positive reading or an indication he was contaminated elsewhere, Eberlein said. That worker is being rechecked to sort out that puzzle.

The radiation doses absorbed by all four were measured at less than 100 millirem, she said.

Five rem — or 5,000 millirem — is the maximum legal dose that a federal worker can receive in a year. Hanford's regulations limit the annual dose to 500 millirem.

See **Unaware**, Page B2

PNNL 27 JUN 03

# considers adding 3 buildings

■ *New construction would be closer to main Richland campus*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

Pacific Northwest National Laboratory is considering adding three new buildings with almost 300,000 square feet of space near its main campus in north Richland in the next five to eight years.

It now has about 875 employees working in Hanford's 300 Area, but the Department of Energy is moving to speed cleanup and tear down offices and laboratories there.

A PNNL task force concluded that in addition to the three buildings it would like constructed by about 2011, two more might be needed as cleanup proceeds. The buildings would not only consolidate capabilities now in the 300 Area closer to the main campus, but also would provide space for future research.

"It's actually an opportunity for us to move forward with a modern research campus," said Greg Koller, a lab spokesman.

Two of the buildings the lab uses in the 300 Area date from the 1970s, but the average age of buildings is 44 years. Most of the buildings in the 300 Area on the north end of George Washington Way were built for defense production during World War II and the Cold War.

## **DOE, state discuss legal disputes**

30 JUN 03

Jessie Roberson, the Department of Energy's cleanup czar, met in Olympia on Thursday with Tom Fitzsimmons, director of Washington's Department of Ecology, and other state officials to discuss how to resolve several legal disputes between their agencies.

This was the first session in talks between DOE and the state that are expected to last several days.

The meeting was described as mapping out ways to resolve differences. They include the state and DOE suing each other in federal court over which agency should have final legal say over transuranic radioactive wastes at Hanford.

Also, DOE has threatened to halt all Hanford work involving radioactive wastes that contain dangerous chemicals because of how a state order is worded.

The two parties have agreed hold off on that dispute until July 7, when they hope to negotiate a compromise on the issue.

— By the Herald staff

THURSDAY, JULY 3, 2003

TRI-CITY HERALD

## Briefs

7-4-03

### **Deadline for Hanford legal battles looms**

Federal and state talks on how to resolve several Hanford legal disputes are expected to extend beyond a Monday benchmark.

The Department of Energy and Washington's Department of Ecology appear likely to extend a July 7 deadline to work out some differences, said Sheryl Hutchison, state ecology department spokeswoman. A new deadline has not been set.

Extending Monday's deadline is because promising progress made in the talks so far, she said.

The talks cover the state and DOE suing each other in federal court over which side should have the final legal say over transuranic radioactive wastes at Hanford.

Also, DOE has threatened to halt all Hanford work involving radioactive wastes that contain dangerous chemicals because of how a state order on chemical-laced transuranic wastes is worded. The state and DOE have agreed to put their threatened actions on hold to see if the current negotiations lead to

some solutions.



# DOE, state extend 8JW03 Hanford talks to August

A deadline for federal and state negotiations on legal disputes involving transuranic wastes at Hanford has been extended into August, the state Department of Ecology reported Monday.

The Department of Energy and the state Ecology Department moved the deadline ahead to take advantage of progress in negotiations, said Ecology spokeswoman Sheryl Hutchison. A more specific date had not been set yet.

The talks are over a dispute between the state and DOE over the handling of radioactive wastes containing dangerous chemicals.

DOE has threatened to halt all Hanford work involving chemical-laced transuranic wastes because of the wording of a state Ecology Department order. The state and DOE have held off on threatened actions to negotiate a solution.

# Vit plant likely to face delay

10 5 22 03  
■ *DOE, state expect to reach accord on revised schedule, reducing work force by 700*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Washington's Department of Ecology expects to agree to a delay in construction

of Hanford's tank waste glassification complex.

A revised schedule means the complex's blue-collar construction work force won't grow as fast or as much as originally predicted — ending up about 700 fewer people than first projected.

Joy Turner, the Ecology Department's tank waste policy and communication manager, said Wednesday that the state

expects to reach an agreement with the Department of Energy soon on a new completion deadline.

She did not know what the potential compromise could be. The new agreement is needed because DOE adopted a revised construction plan in May despite state protests.

DOE's revised plan called for construction finishing in 2008 or early 2009, with

the first radioactive wastes going through the complex in 2010. The existing Tri-Party Agreement's timetable would send the first radioactive wastes through the complex in 2007.

DOE's revised schedule keeps intact the Tri-Party Agreement deadline of having the complex fully operational by 2011. Essen-

See **Delay**, Page A2

# Proposed wind power farm on hold

By **Mary Hopkin**

Herald Valley bureau

**PROSSER** — A decision to allow a proposed wind power farm has been put on hold while a Benton County board considers the project's effect on gravity research in the area.

Thursday, the Benton County Board of Adjustment again postponed its decision to permit the

Maiden Wind Project, after hearing from lawyers and scientists involved with two Hanford-based gravity research programs.

In June, the board directed Washington Winds Inc. to work with representatives from the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory, or LIGO, and the Battelle Gravitation Physics Laboratory, or

BGPL, to resolve scientists' concerns that vibrations from the 500-megawatt wind farm could disrupt the sensitive equipment the laboratories use to measure gravity ripples from space.

Plans for the Maiden Wind project include up to 550 wind turbines along the southwestern slopes of Rattlesnake Ridge —

See **Wind**, Page B2

# CH2M Hill Hanford seeks layoffs

■ *Company asks employees to voluntarily resign before company must cut positions*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The program's title could come from a Dilbert comic strip: "Self-Selection for Involuntary Reduction of Force."

In other words, CH2M Hill Hanford Group is looking for employees to volunteer to take the first hit the next time the company goes through involuntary layoffs.

On Monday, Ed Aromi, the company's president, sent a memo to all of CH2M Hill Hanford Group's approximately 1,400 employees, seeking people willing to select themselves as the first to be laid off when the next work force cuts materialize.

CH2M Hill wants those people to

identify themselves to the company's human resources department by mid-July, said company spokesman Bryan Kidder. These likely would be people already considering leaving CH2M Hill, he said.

The company expects layoffs at an unidentified future date because of ongoing efforts to switch CH2M Hill's focus from maintaining 53 million gallons of radioactive wastes in 177 central Hanford underground tanks to accelerating "closure" of some of those tanks.

Since late 2002, CH2M Hill has been going through a massive reorganization to speed up work while changing focus.

This spring, the company laid off 62 people as part of an effort to better match skills with the work at Hanford's tank farms. Many laid-off workers were transferred to other Hanford contractors.

This rejuggling of jobs likely will continue because different skills will be

needed to "close" tanks as opposed to maintaining them, Kidder said.

The Department of Energy wants to remove almost all solid and liquid radioactive wastes from at least 26 tanks, then seal or "close" those tanks by 2006. DOE and the state have not yet agreed on the conditions that DOE needs to meet before closing the tanks.

CH2M Hill does not have a specific target number of people it hopes or expects to volunteer for future layoffs. And it has not yet calculated the overall numbers of how many people it might lay off in the foreseeable future, Kidder said. CH2M Hill is working on those targets.

The company will try to hang on to employees with certain expertise if it looks like the self-selection process may decimate specific skill groups.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tricityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tricityherald.com).

7-4-03  
■ *Reclassification proposal violates federal act*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

A federal judge ruled Thursday that the Department of Energy cannot reclassify high-level radioactive wastes on paper as something less dangerous — at least without treating the wastes.

Boise-based U.S. District Court Judge B. Lynn Winmill declared that DOE's waste reclassification proposals violated the federal Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982.

"This ruling is a great victory for the environment and communities near high-level radioactive waste sites," said Geoffrey Fettus, attorney for the National Resources Defense Council, one of the challengers of DOE's reclassification plans.

DOE spokesman Joe Davis was more circumspect. "If this decision stands, it could lead to a tremendous burden on taxpayers and jeop-

ardize chances of cleaning up sites sooner," he said.

DOE has not pinpointed which cleanup efforts would be delayed and how much Winmill's ruling might add to cleanup costs, Davis said.

Davis declined to comment on whether DOE will appeal Winmill's ruling.

Reclassifying some high-level radioactive wastes in underground tanks — especially at Hanford, the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory and Savannah River, S.C. — is being seriously considered by DOE as part of its efforts to speed up nuclear cleanup nationwide.

But last year, the Idaho-based Snake River Alliance, the Washington, D.C.-based National

See **DOE**, Page A2

SUNDAY, JUNE 29, 2003

TRI-CITY HERALD

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## Briefs

### **Bechtel gives \$2,500 for children's books**

Bechtel has donated \$2,500 to the Mid-Columbia Reading Foundation to buy more than 2,000 Spanish-language children's books.

Benton-Franklin Health Department home health nurses and workers from La Clinica and the Washington State Migrant Council will distribute the books.

11 Jul 03

## ■ DOE tells Benton deactivation process will continue at facility

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy will conduct an environmental impact study on decommissioning Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility, DOE told Benton County this week.

DOE attorney Betty Hollowell sent a letter Tuesday to Benton County Prosecutor Andy Miller to confirm that the federal agency plans to study the environmental impacts of decommissioning the shutdown reactor. Meanwhile, the FFTF's deactivation continues.

Deactivation and decommissioning are separate actions.

Deactivation covers removing and processing FFTF's spent nuclear fuel and its liquid sodium coolant, plus the removal of its pipes and other equipment.

That work is already under way. Decommissioning will occur a few years from now and will cover demolishing or entombing the actual reactor buildings.

Bottom line: DOE will conduct an environmental impact study on what FFTF's final condition should be, with no timetable set yet for that study other than it must take place before the decommissioning phase begins.

DOE's Tuesday letter was prompted by Benton County

commissioners' concerns about the environmental impact study being done before decommissioning begins. In early June, Miller sent a letter to DOE to express that concern.

His letter cited a recent ruling by U.S. District Judge Ed Shea that an environmental impact study will be conducted before FFTF is decommissioned.

Shea's ruling came from an unsuccessful Benton County government attempt to stop FFTF's deactivation phase until a study was complete.

The county's lawsuit was partly an attempt to halt FFTF's shutdown until its supporters could find a way to revive the research reactor to produce medical isotopes. The dormant FFTF is being shut down because not

enough missions could be found to justify reviving it.

County Commissioner Claude Oliver said the commissioners and their legal advisers will have to study this week's DOE response to determine whether it addresses their concerns.

Right now, DOE is preparing to eventually issue a request for proposals from "small businesses" — defined as those with less than 500 employees — on taking over FFTF's deactivation from Fluor Hanford. That is part of a nationwide DOE push to allocate more nuclear cleanup work to small businesses.

No dates have been set for when that request for proposals might be issued, nor when DOE might award a new FFTF shutdown contract.

DOE is still crunching dollar figures and timetables to figure out how long it should take to deactivate and decommission FFTF.

In late 2002, Fluor Hanford submitted an estimate that it would cost \$623 million to complete deactivation and decommissioning by 2013. That translated to \$36 million needed in fiscal 2003 and \$60 million needed annually through 2013.

Fluor recently submitted revised estimates. Those figures must undergo a review for potential classified information before they can be made public, according to DOE. DOE expects to finish that review soon.

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## **PNNL-formed institute develops momentum**

The Microproducts Breakthrough Institute formed in late 2002 by Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland and Oregon State University is moving ahead more quickly than anticipated.

Hewlett Packard had donated a three- to five-year lease of laboratory and office space near OSU in Corvallis, a donation valued at more than \$2 million. PNNL and OSU officials had not expected to have a facility for the project for three more years.

"This gives us tremendous momentum to reach our goal of a \$20 million business for the MBI by 2006," said co-director Landis Kannberg of PNNL in a prepared statement. Space is available for research and for industry to develop products until a permanent center can be built.

The new institute was formed to provide research centers for the two leaders in microtechnology to develop microsystems products and technologies and quickly move them in the marketplace.



14 JUL 03

# PNNL close to new breast cancer test

■ *Richland lab researchers study molecular indicators*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

Research at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory could lead to a lab test to detect breast cancer on the molecular level before physical changes become visible on a mammogram.

"We think it will be more sensitive because it's trying to detect molecular changes that

## **Breast cancer**

Cadmium may be a risk factor, study finds.

**A5.**

occur very early in cancer," said senior research scientist Rick Zangar at the Richland lab.

He and colleague Susan Varnum have been analyzing the proteins in fluid that's continually secreted and reabsorbed in breasts of women who are not pregnant or nursing.

When cancerous cells begin to develop, they create their own proteins, and healthy cells may also produce different proteins in

response. Abnormal amounts of any of those proteins in the fluid could indicate the presence or risk of breast cancer.

So far, Zangar and Varnum have identified 65 proteins, including 15 that had been previously implicated as potential biomarkers for breast cancer from studies using blood.

"With further analysis, we could detect up to 10 times more proteins in (breast fluid)," Zangar said. "The more proteins we identify, the better chance there is to find one that is linked to breast cancer."

See **PNNL**, Page A2

12 Jul 03

# State OKs DOE's vitrification schedule

■ *Proposal must go through public comment period*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Construction of Hanford's tank waste glassification complex will be drawn out, but its deadline to be fully operational will remain the same under a tentative agreement between the state and the Department of Energy.

Also, DOE has a January 2005 legal

## Fund-raising

Group aims to raise \$10,000 for FFTF fight. **Page B1.**

supplemental technologies will be used on Hanford's tank wastes.

DOE and Washington's Department of Ecology agreed to put these changes into the Tri-Party Agreement, the legal

deadline to report to the state on proposed alternatives to glassifying some of Hanford's tank wastes.

The two sides have until 2006 to hash out whether any of those

pact governing Hanford's cleanup, the two agencies announced Friday.

Those proposed changes must go through a public comment period from July 28 through Sept. 10 before the agencies and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency can adopt them.

The tentative changes address three ongoing debates between the state and DOE.

One issue is DOE announcing in May that it will extend the glassification complex's construction by two to three years

and not start testing it with real radioactive wastes until 2010. The original Tri-Party Agreement deadline to start tests with real radioactive wastes was 2007. The state angrily protested that DOE unilaterally changed the timetable without the regulators' approval.

Friday's announcement has the state agreeing to put most of DOE's May timetable changes into the Tri-Party Agreement.

Laura Cusack, the state ecology department's Tri-Party Agreement

administrator, said DOE has assured the state that it won't order its contractors to produce major schedule changes in the future without the state's participation.

The second debate is whether DOE should assume it will adopt alternatives to conventional glassification to deal with about half of Hanford's 53 million gallons of tank wastes.

DOE has said the current glassification complex under construction can handle possibly 25 million gallons by a 2028

See **Schedule**, Page A2

1254403

# Group seeks funds for FFTF fight

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

I say "decommission."

You say "deactivate."

And Citizens for Medical Isotopes is ready to call the whole thing off.

The group is trying to raise \$10,000 in an attempt to persuade Mid-Columbia and state elected officials in August to revive efforts to resurrect the dormant Fast Flux Test Facility, the organization announced Friday.

Right now, the Department of Energy and contractor Fluor Hanford are deactivating the research reactor — removing spent nuclear fuel and liquid sodium coolant, as well as equipment and piping systems. This work still is in the early stages.

U.S. District Judge Ed Shea gave DOE the legal green light Feb. 28 to proceed with deactivating FFTF. That ruling ended an unsuccessful attempt by Benton County government to delay the shutdown by calling for a new environmental impact study to supersede one conducted in 1995.

The Citizens for Medical Isotopes group, which wants to revive the reactor to produce medical isotopes, argued in a Friday news conference that new factors have emerged that should stop the deactivation work. And its leaders are interpreting Shea's ruling to back their contention that a new environmental impact study is needed before any additional FFTF shutdown work can proceed.

This issue revolves around two words — "deactivation" and "decommissioning."

In simplified terms, "deactivation" refers to cleaning out contaminated and noncontaminated equipment and wastes from a facility. "Decommissioning" means the demolition or entombment of the contaminated reactor and buildings.

In his Feb. 28 ruling, Shea was aware of what "deactivation" and "decommissioning" meant.

And he ruled DOE could legally proceed with deactivating FFTF, but would have to conduct an environmental impact study prior to the decommissioning efforts.

DOE has not settled on a timetable for when deactivation is to be completed, when an environmental impact study will be conducted, and when decommissioning will be tackled. However, the deactivation phase will take a few years to accomplish.

Citizens for Medical Isotopes leaders Carl Holder, Claude Oliver, who is a Benton County commissioner and the group's president, and Ken Dobbins, who is a West Richland City Council member, contended the lack of a definite overall timetable means the whole shutdown effort is "decommissioning."

"That is a *de facto* decommissioning," Oliver said.

Therefore, they argued that Shea's ruling requires an environmental impact study to be conducted before the shutdown work continues.

DOE disagrees with that interpretation, and it is currently doing

"deactivation" work as allowed by Shea's ruling, said DOE spokeswoman Colleen Clark Thursday.

Citizens for Medical Isotopes also

See **FFTF**, Page B2

## ■ *Inventions deemed 3 of the most important in the world over the last year*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland invented three of the most important new technologies developed in the world over the last year, according to a competition by R&D Magazine.

The awards, coveted in the

scientific community, were given to the Richland Department of Energy lab for a technology being used to prevent smuggling, for software that finds related information in enormous collections of disparate material and for an instrument that should quickly advance knowledge of cells on the molecular level.

The three R&D 100 awards bring the total received by the lab to 62 since the contest was started in 1969. Most have been received in the last 15 years.

The 2003 awards include the seventh R&D 100 award for an invention by Richard D. Smith, a PNNL researcher with the title of Battelle fellow.

He developed the proteome

express, a faster method to identify the many proteins in cells that carry on the different functions of cells. Understanding more about how cells work on the molecular level may lead to better understanding of diseases, such as cancer, and new and better ways of treating them.

His technology — an automated, ultra-high resolution combined separation and mass spectrometer-based system — could shorten by years the time

needed to look at the entire protein set of an organism, according to the lab.

The proteome express not only has been demonstrated to be 100 times faster than previous systems, but also is 100 times more sensitive, according to the lab. It can identify many more proteins than other systems and also proteins present in smaller quantities.

See **Award**, Page B5

## ■ *Report says DOE needs state approval to keep cleanup timely*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy might have to soon send some low-level mixed radioactive wastes from Rocky Flats to Hanford to finish cleaning up the Colorado site on time, said a DOE Inspector General's report released Monday.

The same report said DOE needs to push for the state's approval within a few weeks to send those wastes to Hanford.

Kaiser-Hill Co., the cleanup contractor at Rocky Flats, will need a place to dispose of the site's low-level radioactive wastes by August to finish its work by 2006, the report said.

In 2006, Rocky Flats and Fernald, Ohio, are supposed to be the first major DOE sites to be completely finished under a nationwide accelerated nuclear cleanup plan.

Low-level mixed wastes — sludges, metals, rags, clothing and wood — are slightly radioactive while also laced with hazardous chemicals.

Rocky Flats currently has 1,690 cubic yards of low-level radioactive mixed wastes ready for disposal. And it expects to create another 1,950 cubic yards before the cleanup efforts are done.

DOE has two locations identified to eventually receive low-level radioactive mixed wastes from its other sites — Hanford and the Nevada Test Site.

Neither site currently is accepting low-level mixed wastes from elsewhere. The Inspector General's report said Nevada is not expected to be ready to accept off-site low-level mixed wastes until January 2004.

This situation increases pressure on DOE to finish a Hanford-wide solid waste environmental impact study on time.

"Delays in implementation (of removing these wastes from Rocky Flats) beyond the summer of 2003 could have long-term cost and schedule impacts on the accelerated closure of Rocky Flats," the report said.

A third and supposedly final draft of that environmental impact study's conclusions is due to be released later this month. Then DOE has up to one month — which would supposedly end in August — to formally adopt or reject that study's recommendations.

Hanford's solid waste environmental impact study covers several types of wastes, including Hanford importing various wastes from elsewhere.

But last month, Washington's Department of Ecology told DOE that the solid waste environmental study did not adequately analyze the effects of transporting radioactive wastes from other DOE sites to Hanford.

If DOE wants to send Rocky Flats' wastes to Hanford before formally adopting Hanford's solid waste environmental study's recommendations, it will need the state's permission to do so, said Sheryl Hutchison, Ecology spokeswoman.

After the study's recommendations are officially adopted, DOE can send some Rocky Flats wastes to Hanford under a current interim state permit, although a permanent permit will eventually have to be obtained, she said.

DOE's Hanford operation has worked with Rocky Flats to ensure the Colorado wastes will meet Hanford's acceptance criteria.

However, the Inspector General's report recommended DOE step up talks with the state to send Rocky Flats' wastes to Hanford if the Hanford solid waste environmental impact study decisions are delayed beyond August.

■ **Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).**

18 JUL 03  
■ *Partial reactor shutdown would cost \$46.1 million per year*

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

The shutdown of Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility would cost \$46.1 million per year and take until 2019 under the latest proposal under review by the Department of Energy.

Fluor Hanford's third shutdown proposal, which went to DOE on June 30, is to be studied by DOE for two months.

In the latest scenario, DOE allowed Fluor a maximum annual budget of \$46.1 million, and told it to map out a deactivation and decommissioning plan for the research reactor.

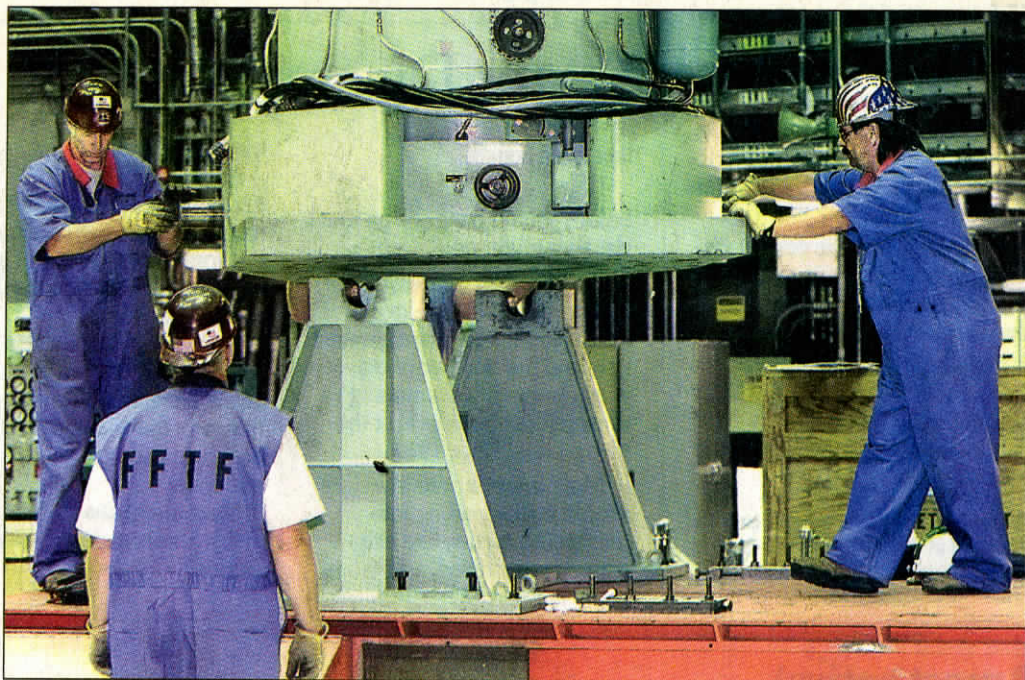
Fluor concluded the total shutdown would cost \$706 million. Deactivation would finish in September 2010. Decommissioning would end in 2019.

Deactivation covers removing spent nuclear fuel and liquid sodium coolant, along with some equipment and piping. Decommissioning covers decontamination, demolition or entombment of the main and outlying reactor buildings.

Workers already have removed liquid sodium from the secondary cooling system. The primary cooling system and the core are expected to be drained in 2005 and 2006.

Right now, workers are focusing on removing the spent fuel to an outdoor storage pad to await eventual shipment to permanent storage at Yucca Mountain, Nev.

If DOE approves Fluor's June 30 submission, that proposal will likely be the jump-off point



Bill Morgan, left, helps Bruce Gradishon guide an empty solid waste cask at Hanford's FFTF main containment dome Tuesday while Terry Nigaard, front left, watches over the process.

for "small businesses" to bid on taking over shutdown efforts. DOE wants to farm out more work nationwide for small businesses — defined as companies with fewer than 500 employees.

Beth Bilson, DOE assistant manager for Hanford's river corridor, said her agency is preparing a request for proposals from small businesses for deactivating FFTF. The request will be made "in the near term," but no date is set, she said.

Here is how the latest proposed shutdown proposal has evolved:

■ In 2002, DOE told Fluor to produce a plan without worrying about budget constraints. The subsequent plan concluded deactivation and decommissioning could be done by December 2009 for \$547 million.

But that plan needed major

annual budget increases, including a \$142 million budget in one year. DOE is unwilling to go with major short-term budget increases. The FFTF budget for fiscal 2003 is about \$36 million, with \$43.8 million requested for fiscal 2004.

■ Later in 2002, Fluor submitted a second plan with an annual budget limit of \$60 million. Fluor calculated that would cost \$623 million, with decommissioning done in September 2013.

■ Fluor's third plan limits the annual budget to \$46.1 million and calls for deactivation to be done in 2010 and decommissioning in 2013. Its price tag is \$706 million, including an extra \$100 million for disposition and processing of sodium-bonded fuel, processing radioactive sodium and disposing of highly

radioactive equipment. Those were not covered in previous calculations.

Removal of FFTF's spent fuel is almost 40 percent complete and will likely take until 2006 to finish, said Bruce Klos, Fluor's acting director for the closure project.

The FFTF has 375 fuel assemblies, including 147 assemblies already in casks on an outdoor concrete pad at the FFTF complex.

Hanford has 12 more storage casks for the work and needs to order another 22 casks to finish the job. Those casks are not expected to arrive until August 2004, which is why it will take until 2006 to finish fuel removal.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tricityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tricityherald.com).

16 JUL 2007

## House panel OKs money for Hanford

The U.S. House Appropriations Committee on Tuesday approved fully funding the Department of Energy's request for Hanford cleanup money for fiscal 2004.

That translates to \$1.096 billion to DOE's Office of River Protection, which manages Hanford's tank wastes, and \$1.014 billion to DOE's Richland office, which manages everything else at Hanford, according to the office of U.S. Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash.

Comparing Hanford's fiscal 2003 budget with its potential fiscal 2004 budget is difficult because DOE changed how the budget was tabulated when it submitted the 2004 request to Congress in February.

The full House is expected to vote next week on the bill containing Hanford's budget, Hastings' staff said. The House's bill will then have to be reconciled with a parallel Senate appropriations bill before a definite Hanford figure emerges.

26 JUL, 03

## Bechtel awards evaporator contract to Framatome

Framatome ANP has won a contract to design and build three evaporator systems for the Bechtel National Inc. Hanford Waste Treatment Plant, the companies said Friday.

The evaporators, to be delivered in 2005, will remove liquid from radioactive waste pumped from Hanford's underground tanks before it is turned into glass for eventual long-term storage, said Thomas Smith, Framatome media relations manager.

The contract is valued at between \$10 million and \$20 million, said Bechtel National spokesman John Britton.

The evaporators will not be built at Framatome's Richland nuclear fuel assembly plant and will have no effect on employment or operations there, said Bob Link, site manager for the Richland facility. The company recently announced it would lay off about 40 people at its Richland plant, bringing the work force there to about 600.

Framatome ANP is based in Paris and employs about 14,000 people worldwide.



25 July 03

## ■ Hanford workers with sensor pill, cooling vest avoid overheating

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

Next week, when highs are expected to reach the low 100s, Julie Gradisher will be wearing a double set of coveralls and shoveling radioactive mud out of an outdoor basin at H Reactor at Hanford.

But the Bechtel Hanford worker will have two technologies, one used by astronauts and the other by race car drivers, to help keep her cool.

To make sure Bechtel workers are not getting too hot on the job, they may be asked to swallow a tiny sensor developed for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to monitor the internal temper-

ature of astronauts.

Workers who volunteer for monitoring are given what looks like a slightly oversized, white vitamin pill to swallow. Tightly packed inside are a battery, temperature-sensitive quartz crystal and communication coils.

The crystal vibrates in response to temperature, and that's translated into a signal that can be read on a sensor outside the body.

Workers may wear the sensor, about the size of a small TV remote control, on their belts for continuous recording and monitoring of their internal temperature.

Once the pill reaches the small intestine, it gives an accurate reading of the worker's body temperature for the next day or two until it's eliminated from the body.

It can alert workers that they

See **Technology**, Page A2

# CH2M Hill on track for waste transfer goal

By the Herald staff

CH2M Hill Hanford Group is on schedule to hit a legal deadline to have 98 percent of Hanford's pumpable liquid wastes removed from its single-shell tanks by Sept. 30, CH2M Hill and the Department of Energy announced Thursday.

Right now, 97 percent of those wastes have been pumped to Hanford's 28 newer and safer double-shell tanks.

That means 33,000 gallons need to be pumped between now and Sept. 30. Then Hanford has until September 2004 to remove the remaining 61,000 gallons of pumpable fluids, according to a

legal agreement between the state and DOE.

Tiny amounts of liquids in cracks and shallow puddles within 31 million gallons of solid wastes are pumped at a drastically slower rate than massive amounts of fluids.

Right now, 136 of Hanford's 149 single-shell tanks have had all

the pumpable fluids removed.

Two more are being checked to confirm their pumping is complete. Pumping continues on eight tanks.

And three had their pumpable liquids deadlines removed because of new plans to remove all their wastes — solid and liquid — by 2005.

## **PNNL's anti-terrorist work featured on TV**

Work at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory to protect the nation from terrorists is expected to be featured on a national television show Tuesday.

The History Channel will air *Modern Marvels — Terror Tech: Civilian*, the first of three episodes on anti-terrorism technologies, at 10 p.m. Tuesday.

When a film crew visited the lab in May, Barbara Seiders, a biological and chemical terrorism expert, was interviewed.

Among the technologies the film crew learned about was a computer visualization system called Starlight. It was developed to help the U.S. intelligence community find related information in huge collections of unrelated databases, including pictures, text and maps. The crew also learned about a mass spectrometry technology that can be used for real-time screening of biological agents, such as in subways or airports. Another technology filmed automates the system for purifying and concentrating samples of potential biological agents. It may be useful to monitor areas where people cannot enter.

**— By the Herald staff**

# ■ Leadership Tri-Cities honors PNNL vice president

31 JUL 03

By **Jeff St. John**

Herald staff writer

Leadership Tri-Cities has given Mike Schwenk its 2003 Sam Volpentest Leadership Award, to recognize his commitment to Tri-City community and economic development causes.

Schwenk, vice president and director of economic development and communications at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, is the fourth recipient of the annual award named after long-time Tri-City community leader Sam Volpentest.



**Schwenk**

“(Schwenk) truly demonstrates leadership for the community,” said Kris Watkins, president of the Tri-Cities Visitor & Convention Bureau and last year’s winner of the award. “He’s been quite active in bringing the entire region together at the table.”

Schwenk has served as president of the Tri-City Industrial Development Council and on boards, including that of Columbia Industries, the Tri-Cities Visitor & Convention Bureau and the Three Rivers Community Roundtable.

As chairman of the roundtable board, Schwenk helped bring together representatives of such disparate fields as agriculture, tourism and the nuclear

See **Schwenk**, Page B5

AUG. 03

# ■ Atomic Heritage Foundation spends week doing interviews for Manhattan Project documentary

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Documentary filmmaker Cynthia Kelly posed the question to Hanford historian Michele Gerber.

“Why should people care about the Manhattan Project?”

With a camera rolling, Gerber rattled off three reasons: the trillions of tax dollars spent on the nation’s atomic weapons and cleanup programs over 60 years, the serious environmental safety questions and “the lessons in democracy it offers us.”

Gerber elaborated: Atomic science was brand new in World War II and during the first years of the Cold War. It created technological, political, ethical and social implications no one had ever thought of.

And today, humankind is facing similar questions about the rapidly expanding fields of genetics and biotechnology.

“The Manhattan Project offers lessons on what happens when something absolutely new is thrust upon us. ... (Genetic and biotechnology issues) which we don’t understand very well today, we can look back at the Manhattan Project to see how they were handled,” Gerber said.

On Friday, Gerber was among the last of a week of interviews for the small Atomic Heritage Foundation documentary crew. The subject: The Manhattan Project, using Hanford as a main example.

# DOE fines Fluor Hanford \$550,000

6 AUG 03  
■ *Company fined for several safety problems at T Plant*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy is penalizing Fluor Hanford \$550,000 for safety problems at Hanford's T Plant.

DOE Hanford Manager Keith Klein told Fluor about the penalties in a July letter to the contractor, citing three problems at T Plant, of which two cost Fluor money.

The money will be deducted from the profits DOE will pay Fluor for its Hanford work.

T Plant is the world's oldest functioning nuclear facility. It was built during World War II to extract plutonium from nuclear fuel for the world's first atomic bombs exploded in New Mexico and in Nagasaki.

Today, T Plant is used to store radioactive materials. Plans call for moving out spent commercial nuclear fuel stored there since the '70s and for preparing to receive radioactive sludge to be removed from

another area at Hanford.

DOE penalized Fluor \$300,000 for crane safety incidents Jan. 16 that increased workers' exposures to electrical, machinery and falling equipment hazards.

Klein's letter criticized Fluor for poor planning, an inadequate briefing for employees before work began, not using the required safety controls and repeated failures to stop the work when problems arose.

Also, safety lapses on Oct. 6 led to a spread of some contamination and a

\$250,000 penalty.

In addition, DOE claims Fluor did not correct problems after an inspection pointed out some deficiencies.

DOE officials could not be reached Tuesday to elaborate on the letter. And Fluor declined to comment, saying the letter and the penalties are an internal contractual matter between the company and DOE.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).

5 AUG 03

# Horse running wild on Hanford captured

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Maybe it was loneliness driving a mystery horse galloping around Hanford for two weeks.

But it's lonely no more.

On Thursday, a Hanford employee brought his own horse to an enclosure near the HAMMER training facility and enticed the loose horse inside.

The mystery horse has been turned over to the state Department of Agriculture, which is trying to find the owner. The bay-colored, somewhat friendly horse, is believed to be about 2 years old.

"We have no idea where it

tors more than 20 miles away July 22.

The horse eluded a few attempts to catch it. "I'm told that the horse seemed to be enjoying itself," Tyree said.

The horse is in good shape. Hanford is full of grass for it to munch on, and the Columbia River provided plenty of water. "It probably thought it was in horse heaven," Alexander said.

Hanford employees also put out some hay, oats and buckets of water for the horse.

After the animal was captured, it was checked for radioactive contamination, with none found.

4 AUG 03

# PNNL team studies possibility of agricultural bioterrorism

■ *DOE instructor warns animals, crops vulnerable*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

In a 1968 episode of *The Wild, Wild West*, a wealthy Egyptian plots to control the world's food prices by unleashing boll weevils genetically altered to devour food crops as well as cotton.

It's an episode that intrigued Donald Fingleton, an instructor at the Department of Energy's Counterintelligence Training Academy, when he discovered it in a late-night session of television surfing.

What must have seemed to 1960s television viewers to be

another far-fetched adventure in the life of 1870s Secret Service agents may have a grain of plausibility today.

"Agriculture, whether it's plants or animals, is easier to attack than humans, in general," Fingleton said.

He and other DOE instructors

See **PNNL**, Page A2





Herald/Paul T. Erickson

A worker grinds a steel fitting Wednesday at the Low-Activity Waste Vitrification Facility north of Richland. Con-

struction on the plant is marking a new milestone: the ability to hang steel beams.

# Vit plant milestone beats deadline

## ■ Waste treatment facility 3 months ahead of schedule

By Nathan Isaacs

Herald staff writer

It normally would be hard to get excited about the assembly of a few steel beams at a construction site.

But this is the Tri-Cities, and the construction site is part of Hanford's \$5.7 billion radioactive waste treatment facility.

Those steel beams represent a milestone, reached three months before a deadline in the Tri-Party Agreement, which outlines the cleanup process for Hanford's nuclear waste.

Officials from the Department of Energy, state Department of Ecology and construction contractor Bechtel National showed off the progress Wednesday during a media tour of the Low-Activity Waste Vitrification Facility, about 26 miles north of Richland.

The building is one of three being built as part of the project that will treat radioactive wastes left over from nearly 50 years of plutonium production at Hanford.

Jim Henschel, project director for Bechtel National, said the steel beams — a grid about 60 feet from one end to the other — are significant because of the work undertaken to reach this new phase of construction.

"We're rising out of the ground," he explained.

Soon, the building's steel-beam skeleton will be visible rising from the desert. The beams and columns will support the building's first floor and above-ground walls.

When complete, it will have a footprint larger than a football field and stand about seven stories tall.

Up to now, construction has concentrated on putting together the countless tons of rebar and concrete that will make up the base of the buildings. Also, design

work and the permit process for the buildings and their guts is about 50 percent complete, Henschel said.

He said construction is averaging about four weeks ahead of schedule.

The milestone also is significant because it shows the collaboration of the different partners and a commitment to the project, said Roy Schepens, manager of DOE's Office of River Protection.

"Safely meeting a Tri-Party Agreement milestone three months early is the type of construction progress we like to see on this project," Schepens said.

The milestone for the steel beams was set for Oct. 30 but actually was reached July 24. While some milestones have been rescheduled as the parties discuss better ways to treat the waste, this was one of the original deadlines.

Bechtel National has to turn over an operating treatment plant by 2011.

■ Reporter Nathan Isaacs can be reached at 582-1556 or via e-mail at [nisaacs@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:nisaacs@tri-cityherald.com).

8 AUG 03

# Lack of funds likely to end Hanford health studies

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

PENDLETON — A lack of money is expected to end much of the work next year that's being done to find out more about the health effects of living downwind or downriver of Hanford and to help the public and doctors understand possible medical risks.

An agency of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday told a citizens advisory group on Hanford health effects that it expects to arrange just one more meeting of the group.

"I'm sure you can come up with seven gazillion studies to be done, but without funding, the agency cannot do (them)," Lawson Bell told the Hanford Health Effects Subcommittee at a meeting in Pendleton. Bell coordinates the group for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, or ATSDR, which is part of CDC.

The subcommittee was started in 1994 to advise the CDC on public health and health research activities related to Hanford that affected life off the nuclear reservation. Much of the work has focused on the effects of airborne releases of radionuclides from plutonium production during World War II and the Cold War.

ATSDR has four Hanford projects that will either reach completion or may be ended for lack of money, said Rita Ford, chief of its energy section.

They include:

■ The ATSDR has been working for years with the subcommittee's input on a public health assessment of what impact waste at Hanford has off site. A draft of the assessment should be ready for public comment in January.

It's the only one of the four projects mandated by law. When it's concluded, ATSDR's legal obligations also will be completed.

■ ATSDR also should conclude a study next year of the rates of heart and autoimmune disease in people who may have been exposed as children to radiation from Hanford.

The study was requested by the subcommittee in response to public meetings over the last decade. People asked if myriad health conditions could be linked to radiation exposure from living near or downwind of Hanford.

9 Aug 03

# CH2M Hill announces new round of layoffs

■ *Employees notified 140  
will be layed off this fall*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

CH2M Hill Hanford Group told its employees Friday to expect 140 layoffs this fall.

The layoff notices will be issued in mid-September, said a memo from Ed Aromi, the company's president, to CH2M Hill employees.

The layoffs are part of an ongoing effort to shift CH2M Hill's focus from maintaining 53 million gallons of radioactive wastes in underground tanks at Hanford to accelerating closing of at least 26 tanks by 2006 and preparing wastes for eventual glassification.

As part of the acceleration effort, CH2M Hill is changing the mix of skills available in its work force, resulting in the layoffs. CH2M Hill has been making these changes since late 2002.

The company laid off 62 workers in the spring and recently found another 48 to volunteer to be laid off. Friday's announced 140 layoffs means that CH2M Hill will have trimmed 250 employees in 2003 by this fall, leaving it with 1,250 to 1,275 people.

CH2M Hill will try to connect laid-off employees with career transfers and help with dealing with the stress, said Aromi's memo.

Aromi wrote: "While work force reductions have come to Hanford before, I am very mindful of the emotional toll this takes on those who go and those who stay."

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tricityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tricityherald.com).

9 AUG 03

# ■ DOE puts pressure on Fluor Hanford to follow Tri-Party pact

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy is increasing pressure on Fluor Hanford to get moving on the long-delayed removal of radioactive sludge from the K Basins.

DOE had ordered Fluor to have all sludge removal problems mapped out and a fix-it plan submitted to the federal agency's Richland office by Friday. But Fluor missed that deadline.

Fluor Hanford has completed that work but still must get approval by its own corporate headquarters, said Fluor Hanford spokesman Geoff Tyree. Consequently, Fluor expects to submit its remedial plan to DOE early next week, he said.

The problem is Fluor and DOE were legally required to start removing radioactive sludge from Hanford's K East Basin by last Dec. 31. Right now, more than seven months later, that removal is not close to beginning.

Hanford is ahead of schedule on moving 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel from the two K Basins, which are huge indoor, water-filled and leak-prone pools 400 yards from the Columbia River. Fluor is trying to finish that project four months early in February 2004.

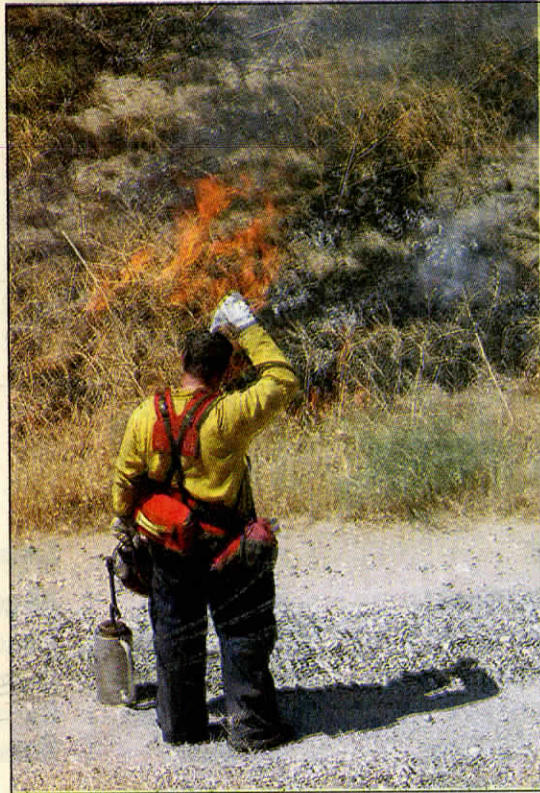
But the two basins also hold 78 cubic yards of highly radioactive sludge — 65 cubic yards in the K East Basin and 13 cubic yards in the K West Basin.

The Tri-Party Agreement, the legal pact governing Hanford's cleanup, requires that all the K East sludge be removed by Aug. 31, 2004 — a year from now.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board have criticized DOE for falling behind on the sludge removal. That included a \$76,000 EPA fine against DOE in April for missing the Dec. 31, 2002, Tri-Party Agreement startup deadline. If the EPA wanted to, it could increase that fine by \$170,000 to reflect the 17 weeks passed without any sludge removal since the April fine. Meanwhile, DOE's Washington, D.C., headquarters is pressing DOE's Richland office and Fluor

17 JULY 03

# Fire scorches Rattlesnake Mountain



■ *2,000-acre blaze likely started by ricocheting bullet*

**Vicki Adame**

Herald staff writer

A brush fire charred 2,000 acres on the southeast edge of Rattlesnake Mountain on Wednesday.

The blaze apparently started on the adjacent Rattlesnake Mountain shooting range, then climbed the mountain's shoulder onto the fringes of the Hanford Reach National Monument. The fire burned 300 hundred acres of the Arid Lands Ecology Reserve, as well as some Hanford and Bureau of Land Management property.

The fire likely started when a bullet ricocheted off a rock at the shooting range and the spark it generated was enough to start a fire, said Fire Capt. Jeff Ripley of Benton County District 1. Firefighters from Benton County

## Wildfires

Crews progress against Arizona fire. **A6.**

District 2 initially responded to the 9:31 a.m. fire, Ripley said. The fire spread quickly and reinforcements were called within minutes. The fire was fully contained at 4 p.m.

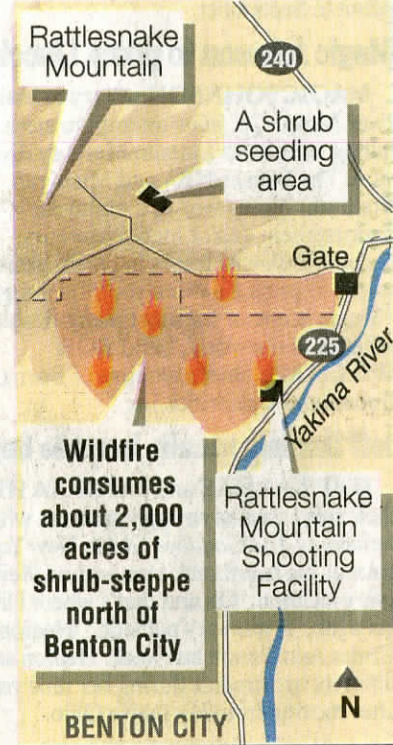
Thirty vehicles and 100 firefighters from Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla counties and from Kennewick, Pasco, Richland and Hanford fire departments were called out.

Benton County Emergency Management coordinated the fire response, said public information officer Steve Sautter.

The immediate and large-scale response was prompted by low humidity, high temperatures and the potential for wind, Sautter said.

"Essentially, we wanted to cut it off at the pass so it didn't get out of control," Sautter said.

By 1 p.m., the fire was about 80 percent contained, said Mike Cobb, director of Benton County Emergency Management.



**Wildfire consumes about 2,000 acres of shrub-steppe north of Benton City**

See **Fire**, Page A2

Herald/Sherry Emery

# Fire threatened Reach restoration

■ *\$5.7 million spent after 2000 fire to restore shrub-steppe habitat*

**By Anna King**

Herald staff writer

A 2,000-acre wildfire Wednesday threatened some of the habitat restoration efforts the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has invested \$5.7 million in since the massive Hanford fire three years ago.

The blaze burned onto the Han-

ford Reach National Monument on Rattlesnake Mountain, charring 300 acres there, and came within about two miles of sensitive restored shrub-steppe habitat, said officials with the federal agency.

"Our concerns are, of course, to protect the natural plantings we just put in," said Paula Call, outdoor recreation planner for the service.

The Hanford Fire in late June 2000 destroyed 163,000 acres of native sagebrush, grasses and other plants that provide habitat for many wildlife species, Call said.

Migratory birds such as sage sparrows, loggerhead shrikes and burrowing owls use shrub-steppe habitat, and it's in short supply in Washington state, Call said.

"Most of the shrub-steppe has been converted to agricultural or urban development," she said.

Since the 2000 fire, the Fish and Wildlife Service has replanted some of the areas that were burned. That work was finished only this month, Call said.

See **Reach**, Page A2



The charred leaves of a Carey's balsamroot plant stand out against the scorched ground after Wednesday's brush fire along Highway 225. The blaze came within about two miles of sensitive, restored shrub-steppe habitat on the Hanford Reach National Monument.

14 AUG 03

## ■ *Bechtel appealed award of contract to competitor*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The General Accounting Office on Wednesday ruled in favor of Bechtel National in its appeal of the Department of Energy's decision to award a \$974 million Hanford cleanup contract to a rival.

The announcement means the GAO believes DOE should review the criteria used in awarding the contract, then re-evaluate the bids, said Scott Riback, the GAO attorney in charge of reviewing Bechtel's appeal.

DOE spokesman Tom Welch said his agency will study the GAO recommendation.

Bechtel Hanford, a subdivision of Bechtel National, will continue its work to remove contamination from Hanford's

Columbia River shore and demolish and seal old up reactor complexes while DOE ponders what to do.

"We're going to continue to focus on job safety and meeting our commitments," said Bechtel spokesman Todd Nelson.

Rod Hunt, a spokesman for the contract winner, the Washington Closure Co., said, "We're going to let events take their course. This was certainly a disappointment."

DOE, Bechtel and Washington Closure

did not know Wednesday why the GAO decided in favor of Bechtel.

The GAO, which is Congress' investigative arm, expects to provide a written document to the parties after Bechtel and Washington Closure review it to ensure no proprietary information is released in that disclosure.

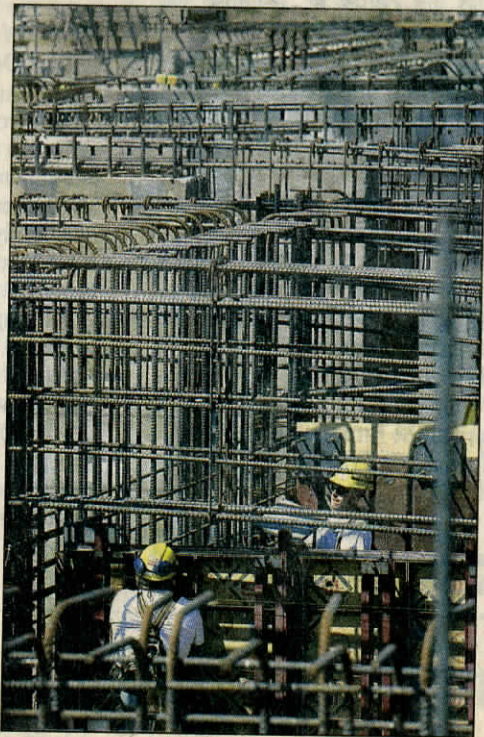
Bechtel filed the appeal May 6 after DOE awarded the contract to Washington

See **GAO**, Page A2

13 AUG 03

Work continues at Bechtel National's \$5.6 billion vitrification plant. The company hired an additional 70 people during July to work on the project. The hirings helped propel the region's construction employment to a 20-year high.

Herald/Paul T. Erickson



## ■ *Tri-City job market growing but slowing, state economist says*

**By Jeff St. John**

Herald staff writer

Construction employment in the Mid-Columbia reached a 20-year peak in July, and Bechtel National hired an additional 70 workers at its Hanford nuclear waste treatment plant.

Overall, growing but slowing described the Tri-City job market last month, said Dean Schau, state regional labor economist for the Tri-City region.

Nonfarm employment in the Tri-Cities stood at 84,100 in July, the same as last month but a 1.9 percent growth from the same month last year, according to statistics released Tuesday by the state Employment Security Department.



12 AUG 03

# PNNL sets up culverts to test fish friendliness

■ *System developed at hatchery near Tenino to evaluate designs*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

Tens of thousands of culverts under roadways in the West are keeping tiny salmon from moving upstream to the habitat they need to grow, but little science is available to show which changes to culverts would most help fish.

As Washington alone prepares to spend millions to retrofit culverts, it and other states and the federal government have hired

Pacific Northwest National Laboratory to determine which culvert designs are the most fish friendly.

"There's been a lot of speculation that has gone on, but there has not been a lot of information," said Walter Pearson, fish behaviorist and program manager for the lab.

The lab has built a test bed system at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Skookumchuck Hatchery near Tenino to test different culvert designs. Scientists at the national laboratory in Richland and its Marine Sciences

See **Culverts**, Page A2

14 AUG 03

## ■ *HEHF extension gives DOE more time to consider proposals*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy has extended the contract of the Hanford Environmental Health Foundation through the end of December.

HEHF's contract would have expired Sept. 30, but the extension was awarded to give DOE more time to consider proposals submitted for a new contract for occupational medical services at Hanford.

DOE is not releasing the number of proposals submitted, who submitted them or any details of them. Federal regulations prohibit that information from being made public, said DOE spokeswoman Andrea Powell.

DOE has sent lists of questions back to those who submitted proposals based on the specifics of each, Powell said. Answers are due by Sept. 2. DOE's Richland office would like to conclude its review and make a recommendation by the end of September.

7 AUG 03

## **LIGO tour to discuss spacequake quest**

The Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory is having a public tour from 1:30 to 4 p.m. today.

The tour includes a discussion of LIGO's quest to detect and study spacequakes and a walking tour of the observatory.

Directions to LIGO are available at [www.ligo.caltech.edu](http://www.ligo.caltech.edu) or by calling 372-8181.

Admission is free.

# 14 15 6-0 Mid-Columbia Engineering lands Hanford contract

Bechtel National Inc. has awarded Richland-based Mid-Columbia Engineering a subcontract worth about \$3 million to design and build remote control trolleys to handle radioactive waste at Hanford's waste treatment plant.

Mid-Columbia Engineering will design and build the standardized bogies, as the trolleys are called, at its Richland office and fabrication facilities, said Carrie Meyer, Bechtel spokeswoman.

The contract is valued at between \$3 million and \$4 million, said Eric Gerber, a Mid-Columbia Engineering company officer. The company employs about 300 people and has offices in Richland, Bellingham and Oak Ridge, Tenn., he said.

13 AUG 03

# HAB OKs plan to ship tank wastes

■ *Committee's recommendation will be presented to full board at Sept. 4-5 meeting in Seattle*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

A federal plan to process some radioactive Hanford tank wastes and ship them to New Mexico within the next few years won approval Tuesday from a Hanford Advisory Board committee.

The tank waste committee agreed to send its recommendation to the full HAB board meeting Sept. 4-5 in Seattle.

The Department of Energy wants to dry out up to 1.3 million gallons of Hanford's 53 million gallons of tank wastes. After drying, they could be considered transuranic wastes eligible to be shipped to permanent underground storage in New Mexico.

The idea is to remove the wastes from Hanford's tank farms before glassification of much of the 53 million gallons begins in 2011.

The ability to speed up disposal of some tank wastes appealed to board members.

DOE thinks materials from 12 tanks could be tailored to this approach. The HAB committee and Washington's Department of Ecology said they agree the wastes in eight of the tanks are appropriate for the process but have questions about the rest.

DOE could have the first wastes ready to ship to New Mexico as early as 2005, depending on how transuranic waste shipments to New Mexico are scheduled from other DOE sites, agency officials said. The long-term savings still have to be calculated, but they believe a few hundred million dollars could be trimmed from overall waste glassification costs through 2028 by shipping the plan.

The HAB committee asked DOE for more information.

The state wants DOE's New Mexico site and the state of New Mexico involved in the planning, said Suzanne Dahl, tank waste disposal project manager for the ecology department.

14 AUG 03

# DOE seeks volunteers to leave jobs

■ *Up to 50 employees offered chance at Richland, River Protection offices*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy is hunting for up to 50 employees to volunteer to leave its Richland operations office and its Office of River Protection.

If the 50 are found, the 446 DOE employees in the Tri-Cities could shrink to 396 by Dec. 31, continuing a three-year trend of fewer DOE employees to manage a growing contractor work force.

It's part of a nationwide DOE push to shed employees by offering early retirements or buyout payments.

DOE wants up to 35 people to volunteer by Sept. 2 to leave its 330-person Richland office. The agency is targeting middle to high pay grades among general engineers, nuclear engineers, scientists, health physicists, analysts, human resources managers and contractor relations specialists.

And DOE has asked the Office of River Protection to find up to 15 engineers and scientists among the same pay grades to volunteer by Sept. 2 to leave its 116-person staff.

Colleen Clark, DOE Richland office spokeswoman, said the agency plans to maintain a strong oversight of Hanford contractors, and there is a possibility some new hires might replace some who leave.

However, Erik Olds, spokesman for the Office of River Protection, said his group does not expect to replace any who leave.

A year ago, the Duffy Group, a consulting firm run by former DOE national cleanup czar Leo Duffy, criticized DOE's 2002 plans to shrink the Office of River Protection from 121 people to 110, saying 110 is too small to manage Hanford's tank waste projects effectively. Instead, the report recommended hiring 50 more experts.

Olds said the Office of River Protection has since reorganized and is in good shape to absorb any losses and to supervise contractors at the tank farms.

See **DOE**, Page B2

13 AUG 03

# ■ *Slightly contaminated mud from H Reactor*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

Just think of what of the wasp larvae of H Reactor could grow up to be.

Maybe something out of a Japanese monster flick.

But Bechtel Hanford is tackling the radioactive mud dauber wasps nests of Hanford's H Reactor complex, while trying to entice the insects to use nonradioactive mud for their homes.

Bechtel first discovered this menace June 26.

The company is tearing down the long-abandoned Cold War plutonium-production reactor's contaminated buildings prior to sealing up the main core chamber. Workers found a slightly radioactive mud dauber's nest in a nook in a wall on the south side of the complex, said Bechtel spokesman Todd Nelson.

That was the first time that Hanford had ever encountered a radioactive wasp nest.



Photo courtesy Department of Entomology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

A mud dauber wasp stands on top of some dried mud.

Since then, workers have found many slightly contaminated nests in the nooks and crannies of the H Reactor complex next to the Columbia River.

"There's more than dozens," Nelson said.

Female mud dauber wasps pick up mud to create tiny tube-like nests bunched next to each other like tiny pipe organs beneath the eaves of buildings.

At H Reactor, these 1/2- to 3/4-inch-long wasps are picking up their mud from the complex's contaminated spent nuclear fuel

See **Wasps**, Page A2

15 AUG 03

## ■ *Work completed on processing plutonium-laced residue at Cold War plant*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Hanford recently finished processing plutonium-laced residues at its Plutonium Finishing Plant, checking off another box in the PFP project.

That means the PFP workers only have to finish converting the site's plutonium-laced solids into safer forms to complete the "stabilization" of Hanford's stored plutonium.

Fluor Hanford hopes to finish stabilizing solids prior to February 2004,

which is the deadline in its contract with the Department of Energy. That February deadline is ahead of a Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board deadline of May 2004 to complete that work.

"I want to give credit to the workers. ... This is one of the most complex clean-up jobs in the nation," said Kent Smith, Fluor's PFP director.

Since 2000, the approximately 600 PFP employees put together four streaks of more than 1 million hours worked without an accident causing someone to miss a day on the job.

During the Cold War, the PFP was the final step in Hanford's plutonium-making processes, converting plutonium-laced fluids into pure plutonium pellets that looked like hockey pucks. After the

PFP shut down, it held 4.4 tons of plutonium mixed within 19.6 tons of scrap materials.

That scrap plutonium has existed as liquids, different types of powders, alloys, metal chunks and in a form similar to plastic that's called a "polycube."

Each form of leftover plutonium required a different way of converting it into a safer form for eventual shipment to a permanent storage site in New Mexico, or to Savannah River, S.C., for additional processing.

These leftover plutonium forms can be roughly divided into three types — liquids, powderlike residues and solids.

Fluor finished stabilizing the liquids in July 2002 and completed the residue

See **Goal**, Page B7



20 AUG. 03

# Oliver continues struggle for FFTF despite setbacks

**By Nathan Isaacs**

Herald staff writer

Claude Oliver believes there are some struggles you just don't quit on, and saving Hanford's dormant test reactor is one of them.

Oliver said Tuesday that he remains committed to restarting the Fast Flux Test Facility despite Monday's actions by his fellow Benton County commissioners not to support his efforts.

Oliver faced similar uphill struggles when he successfully fought the government to get the money the county and others would have collected in property taxes for Hanford lands.

Since then, millions of dollars in the Payment In Lieu of Taxes, or PILT, program have been spent for such projects as school improvements, improved radios for emergency services and Benton County Fairgrounds improvements, among other uses, Oliver said.

Oliver plans to drive across the country as a way to raise awareness of the issue. He intends to leave Sunday

and end the trip outside the White House.

Oliver believes his trip will cost about \$10,000. As of Tuesday morning, he had raised about \$3,000. Benton County commissioners Leo Bowman and Max Benitz Jr. said they were not willing to spend any more money on the issue.

Oliver and other FFTF advocates believe the reactor could aid in the fight against cancer by producing medical isotopes. Advocates also believe the fuel for the next generation of nuclear reactors can be tested with FFTF.

Not using FFTF for those two objectives would be a waste of taxpayers' money and time, Oliver said.

Joining the trip will be John Thomas, a veteran of Oliver's fight for federal PILT money. Thomas, a private consultant, said bulldogs win in politics, and that's what Oliver and other advocates have to be now.

"You don't stop on some issues," he said.

**■ Reporter Nathan Isaacs can be reached at 582-1556 or via e-mail at [nisaacs@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:nisaacs@tri-cityherald.com).**

16 Aug 03

# Blackout gives FFTF backers hope

■ *Supporters say nation needs reactor, plan to tell president*

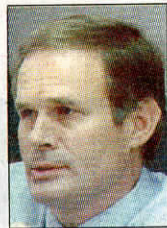
By Nathan Isaacs  
Herald staff writer

The East Coast's massive blackout Thursday could have been prevented had Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility been running and testing tomorrow's nuclear power generators, said Benton County Commissioner Claude Oliver.

"The energy blackout on the East Coast couldn't have happened at a better time," Oliver said.

"We're moving this message

and we're moving it back to the president because we got a lot of confusion in between. And we're going to make sure that message does get there."



Oliver

and how terrorism risks could be reduced and how the next generation of nuclear reactors could be built if FFTF is restarted.

"(FFTF) is the testing facility this nation desperately needs,"

Oliver said.

"If (President Bush) wants his energy policy to go forward, he has to stop the destruction of this facility."

FFTF's advocates are trying to persuade Mid-Columbia and state elected officials to push for the dormant reactor's resurrection.

That includes asking the Department of Energy this week to refill and reheat the reactor's secondary coolant loops to prevent a "de facto" decommissioning.

DOE and contractor Fluor Hanford are deactivating the research reactor — removing spent nuclear fuel and liquid sodium coolant, as well as equipment and piping systems.

Gary Troyer, incoming president of Citizens for Medical Isotopes, said government reports indicate keeping FFTF running is integral to creating scalable nuclear reactors that could stabilize regional power supplies and therefore eliminate the need for the large power-sharing grids, such as those on the East Coast.

Reducing those grids or eliminating them altogether would prevent large-scale blackouts, as well as reduce the threat of terrorism, Oliver said.

Officials haven't pinpointed a cause for Thursday's blackout that left millions without electricity but investigators are focusing on the aging transmission system.

Oliver is expected to discuss

the FFTF issue with Benton County Commissioners Monday morning.

One possibility is supplying Oliver a county pickup to drive cross country and to the White House carrying the group's message.

Oliver would not comment on the specifics, but expects to release details about the group's plans next week.

"(Discussion on restarting FFTF) needs to get out of the hallways of ho-hum-ism and onto the front lines," Oliver said. "Working men and women are not going to be let down."

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17 JUL 03

# DOE criticized over spent fuel canisters

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

A federal audit has criticized the Department of Energy for not using standardized spent nuclear fuel canisters at its cleanup sites, including Hanford.

However, DOE contends Hanford's K Basins project needed specialized canisters quickly and could not wait for a standardized container to be designed.

DOE's Inspector General's office released a report earlier this month noting Hanford and two other national-level DOE programs developed three different spent nuclear fuel canisters for temporary storage.

The report concluded DOE could have saved \$9 million to \$24 million by developing one canister for all three programs.

The report said the cost of assembling one standardized canister would be about \$20,000, while the cost to assemble one K Basins-specific canister — dubbed a "multi-canister overpack," or "MCO" — is about \$80,200.

Finally, the report raised the likelihood that the K Basins fuel stored inside the MCOs might have to be inserted into a new type of canister when it is sent to Yucca Mountain, Nev., for permanent storage.

Hanford is more than halfway through moving 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel from the K Basins to a huge underground vault in central Hanford pending shipment to Yucca Mountain. That work is on track to be finished in less than a year.

The K Basins fuel is inserted into the MCOs, then all moisture and air sucked out and helium inserted to prevent the water from breaking down into the potentially explosive combination of hydrogen and oxygen.

Christine Gelles, DOE manager for corporate projects for spent fuel management, said DOE agrees standardized canisters make sense elsewhere and for moving 12.1 tons of spent fuel at Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility.

She cited several reasons why the K Basins project doesn't use standardized containers:

■ Hanford needed the MCOs before stan-

dardized canisters could be designed because it was urgent to get the fuel out of the K Basins and away from the Columbia River.

■ The K Basins fuel has greater potential to emit dangerous gases, which the MCOs are designed to handle.

■ And it would be too expensive to switch from MCOs to standard canisters now, Gelles said.

DOE is unsure whether the fuel in the MCOs will have to be switched to new canisters to be shipped to Yucca Mountain.

All spent nuclear fuel — including fuel in standard canisters — that is sent to Yucca Mountain will have to be inserted into bigger storage containers at the Nevada site, Gelles said.

DOE will have to study whether the MCOs, which are moved and stored vertically at Hanford, can be safely shifted to a horizontal position to be trucked to Nevada, she said.

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# Benton commissioner still fights for FFTF

■ *Oliver only commissioner pushing for restart*

**By Nathan Isaacs**

Herald staff writer

Claude Oliver expects to drive across the country in the next couple of weeks to raise awareness of the effort to restart Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility.

He won't be making the trip, however, with the support of his fellow Benton County commissioners.

Commissioners Leo Bowman and Max Benitz Jr. said Monday that the county has reached its limit in the fight to restart the dormant test reactor.

"It's dead. It's buried. There's only bones left," Bowman said. "Stay home and work on things you can affect. ... It's a waste of Benton

County funds and resources to continue this fight."

Bowman said the attention-getting efforts by Oliver and other FFTF advocates — such as the 2001 Cancer Fighters Train trip down the West Coast — in the past two years have done little to alter a political decision made a decade ago.

Oliver was asking his fellow commissioners Monday to sign a letter to federal officials encouraging them to reconsider restarting FFTF with a mission as a testing platform for the next generation of nuclear reactors. Commissioners from Yakima and Franklin counties have already signed the letter.

Oliver also was asking for the use of a county pickup to take his message across the country, decorated with U.S. flags blowing in the breeze, and finishing at the White House.

But Bowman and Benitz said they would not spend any more money on the issue. And they said the only letters they would agree to send need to pertain to FFTF's deactivation, not new missions.

DOE and contractor Fluor Hanford are currently deactivating the research reactor — removing spent nuclear fuel and its liquid sodium coolant, as well as other equipment and piping systems.

Last week, the county sent a letter to the Department of Energy asking that it refill and rehear the reactor's secondary coolant loops to prevent a "de facto" decommissioning while an environmental study is performed.

Oliver and other advocates have tried to get the reactor restarted in the last several years for several potential missions, including to produce medical isotopes that would help fight cancer.

The group now contends

that federal reports say fuel for the next generation of nuclear reactors can be tested only with FFTF.

Oliver also is trying to spin last week's massive energy blackout in the East as a reason for restarting the reactor.

Bowman said he didn't see the connection between FFTF and the outage, which officials believe was caused by aging transmission lines.

"I don't know how many times I have to hear the word no," Bowman asked.

Oliver said he was disappointed. He said he would check with the commissioners from Yakima and Franklin counties to see if the letter should still be sent. He said the letter could be sent without the other two Benton County commissioners' signatures.

And he said he'll seek private donations to fund his trip.

■ **Reporter Nathan Isaacs can be reached at 582-1556 or via e-mail at [nisaacs@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:nisaacs@tri-cityherald.com).**



**Oliver**

22 AUG. 03

## ■ CH2M Hill finds ways to dissolve, then remove solid wastes

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Hanford is cranking up the removal of radioactive solid wastes from its underground tanks.

That begins a new phase in moving waste out of the site's tanks, and in sealing up 26 tanks by 2006.

Central Hanford has 149 old, leak-prone, single-shell tanks plus 28 newer and safer double-shell tanks that hold 22 million gallons of liquid radioactive wastes and 31 million gallons of solid or thick sludgy wastes.

Hanford wants to move all those wastes to the double-shell tanks, where the material will be eventually glassified or otherwise treated.

Most liquid wastes have been pumped to the double-shell tanks. But the solid radioactive wastes remain in the single-shell tanks, as the Department of Energy and contractor CH2M Hill Hanford Group work on ways to dissolve the solids into liquids so they can be pumped out. After that, DOE will do some yet-to-be-determined work on the tanks to permanently seal them.

DOE and CH2M Hill have dissolved enough solids so far to expect to start pumping some out of Tank C-106 this week.

Overall, Hanford expects to remove all the solid wastes — almost 1.1 million gallons — out of seven single-shell tanks by early January.

Because the tanks' wastes have different chemical makeups and different consistencies, several removal methods are needed so they can be tailored to the wastes.

CH2M Hill is developing four ways to dissolve and remove solids from the massive tanks, accessible only through narrow pipes leading to the ground's surface. These are to:

■ Pump diluted oxalic acid into Tank C-106, which turns the thick sludge into fluids. This project is on schedule to empty

the tank by Oct. 4, DOE and CH2M Hill officials said.

■ Shoot water through big hoses to break up and dissolve salt-caked material, so the resulting liquids can be pumped. Hanford expects to start this procedure in Tank S-112 in September, finishing it by Sept. 30. Tank S-102 is the next in line for this procedure, with DOE and CH2M Hill planning to finish removing its wastes by Jan. 15, 2004.

■ Use a powerful upside-down sprinkler to spray and break up radioactive salt cakes into liquids to be pumped. Some preliminary tests have been done at Tank U-107. But now, Hanford has resumed pumping all the original liquids wastes out of that tank.

At an undetermined later date, the sprinkler system will be reactivated to tackle the solid wastes in Tank U-107.

■ Use a "tank crawler," a remote-controlled, 6-foot-long bulldozer teamed up with a giant vacuum cleaner.

The bulldozer folds up to fit through a 42-inch diameter pipe leading into a tank. When it reaches the solid wastes, the bulldozer uses a small water cannon to burrow through the wastes to push the material within range of a vacuum hose reaching up to the surface.

DOE and CH2M Hill finished all the tank crawler tests with simulated wastes last month, 11 months ahead of the Tri-Party Agreement deadline of June 30, 2004.

Now Hanford has to design and build the above-surface equipment that goes with the tank crawler. DOE plans to begin using this crawler for the first time on Tank C-104 in 2006, aiming to remove all its solid wastes by a legal deadline of Sept. 30, 2007.

Meanwhile, Hanford plans to use the vacuum only to suck the solid wastes out of four smaller tanks — C-201, C-202, C-203, and C-204 — by December.

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21 AUG 03

## ■ Milestone shows DOE on pace to beat Sept. 30 legal deadline

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Hanford's liquid tank waste pumping hit the 3 million gallon mark this week, with the Department of Energy hoping to beat its next legal tank farm deadline by one month.

The 3 million gallons is an internal DOE milestone showing that it is ahead of schedule on the pumping.

"It does show we're making good progress," said Andy Stevens, program manager for interim stabilization at DOE's Office of River Protection.

DOE and contractor CH2M Hill Hanford Group face a legal deadline of Sept. 30 to remove 98

percent of the original almost 3.1 million gallons in liquid wastes in Hanford's single-shell tanks that were present in 1998 when a court agreement was reached.

DOE and CH2M Hill have to pump another 7,000 gallons in fluids to reach that 98 percent mark, which they hope to accomplish by Aug. 30, Stevens said.

Hanford is legally required to remove the remaining 2 percent of the original pumpable liquid wastes — 62,000 gallons — by Sept. 30, 2004.

Those targets were set in 1998 as part of a federal court decree after Gov. Gary Locke threatened to sue DOE over delays in pumping liquid wastes from Hanford's 149 older and leak-prone single-shell tanks into 28 newer and safer double-shell tanks.

The original deadline under the Tri-Party Agreement, the legal

pact governing Hanford's cleanup, was to pump all liquids from the single-shell tanks by 2000. But to avoid litigation in 1998, DOE and the state negotiated a new court-enforced deadline of 2004 to move all pumpable liquid wastes to the 28 double-shell tanks.

Central Hanford's 177 underground tanks hold about 31 million gallons of solid or thick sludgy radioactive wastes and about 22 million gallons of liquid wastes.

Eventually, the liquid wastes are supposed to be converted into glass or otherwise treated.

Meanwhile, CH2M Hill and DOE are just beginning to try to remove the solid and thick sludgy wastes from the 149 single-shell tanks.

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27 AUG 03

■ *Judge determines agency discriminated because of sex, race during 1997 pregnancy*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

An administrative judge recently ordered the Department of Energy to pay \$100,000 in damages plus at least \$41,000 in legal costs to a black Richland woman employee who was discriminated against in 1997.

Administrative Judge Zulema Hinojos-Fall of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Seattle district ruled July 18 that the human resources department of DOE's Richland office discriminated against Geneva Ellis-Balone because of her sex and race during a difficult 1997 pregnancy.

The suit revolved around Ellis-Balone's difficulties in an unsuccessful attempt to telecommute from her Richland home while

24 AUG 05  
*PNNL develops  
device to help  
nation's overworked  
electrical system*

**By Jeff St. John**

Herald staff writer

**P**acific Northwest National Laboratory scientist Rob Pratt holds in his hand a possible fix for the nation's overworked electricity grid.

That is, if the nation's electric utilities, appliance makers and consumers want to buy into it.

Pratt is manager of PNNL's Energy Systems Transformation Initiative, which since 2001 has researched ways to help the nation's overworked electricity grid adapt to the future.

Recently, he demonstrated one of the initiative's newest products — a playing-card-sized integrated circuit, called a “grid-friendly appliance controller,” that could help avoid disasters like the recent blackout across the Northeast.

The integrated circuit is a prototype for what Pratt hopes will be a standard feature of appliances of the future — a sensor that can detect when the electricity grid is under stress and then turn the appliance off, possibly saving the grid from failure.

“We're going to try to teach your appliances to pay attention to that,” he said.

The need for technology to help the nation's overworked electrical transmission grid was



26 AUG 03

## **DOE expected to announce plans for PNNL contract**

The Department of Energy is expected to announce plans this week for an operating contract for Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland.

Battelle was to begin a new five-year contract in October 2002. Instead, its present contract was extended several times as details for the new contract were negotiated. The most recent extension expires Sunday.

DOE does not expect another short-term extension will be necessary, said Andrea Powell, a spokeswoman for DOE's Richland office.

The new contract should more closely reflect commercial standards and best practices, rather than a separate set of standards developed by DOE. It also is expected to provide an incentive for a "grand challenge" to produce a major scientific breakthrough that would not be possible without extensive coordination, cooperation and use of the Richland lab's sophisticated and one-of-a-kind equipment.

Battelle has operated the lab since 1965.

26 AUG 03

# *Fastest nonmilitary supercomputer in the nation makes its home in Richland*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

**R**ichland can now claim bragging rights as the hometown of the nation's fastest supercomputer in operation for nonmilitary work.

The new \$24.5 million computer at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory has started operating at full power, Bill Rogers, director of PNNL's Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory, said Monday.

Worldwide, just four supercomputers are faster.

But civic pride aside, it means that researchers around the nation have a powerful new tool for answering scientific questions that were too complicated or time-consuming to address before.

"It's already oversubscribed," Rogers said of the new supermachine.

Its first components were brought on line this winter to replace a supercomputer ordered in 1996. That one was a powerhouse in its day, ranked the sixth-most-powerful computer in the world when it was installed.

But the new supercomputer is 50 times faster. A project that would have tied up



the old supercomputer for 50 days can be done in a single day on the new supercomputer.

"We have problems of national interest that require this computational horsepower," Rogers said.

See **Speed**, Page A2

# Battelle signs new PNNL contract

■ *Company can earn up to \$7.8 million in annual fees based on performance*

**By Annette Cary**  
Herald staff writer

Battelle signed a contract Tuesday worth an estimated \$2.5 billion to operate the Department of Energy's national laboratory in Richland through September 2007.

The contract uses a tougher grading system but increases the potential fees

Battelle could earn after the corporation received "outstanding" ratings five years in a row. It's the highest rating given.

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See **Contract**, Page A2

27 Aug 03

## ■ *Transducer uses ultrasonic waves to seek tank cracks*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

Hanford's underground radioactive waste tanks have "knuckles."

And until recently, Hanford has had an incomplete picture of how those knuckles are holding up under the heat, pressure and nasty chemicals inside its tanks.

Think of a tank as a glass from your kitchen. There is the bottom, and there is vertical wall portion.

The knuckle is the inward curving portion connecting the wall and the bottom.

Now switch your thoughts over to a Hanford double-shell tank — 75 feet in diameter and 48 feet tall with its top buried 7 to

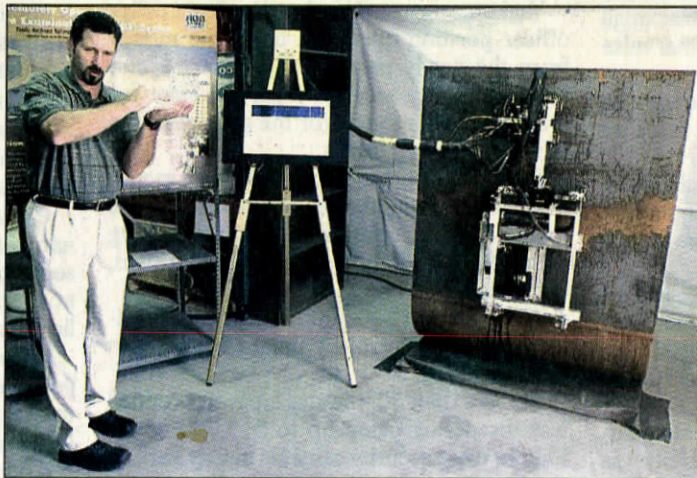
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Hanford has 28 of these double-shell tanks, which are the chief storage containers for the site's highly radioactive liquid wastes left over from producing plutonium.

Experts are keeping their eyes on whether the wastes' heat, pressures and chemicals will crack the inner walls to leak into the 2-foot-wide gap between the inner and outer tank walls. If so, that would leave just one stainless steel barrier between the radioactive fluids and the surrounding ground.

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Herald/Christina Stuart

Allan F. Pardini of PNNL on Tuesday describes the ultrasonic waves used in the transducer, right, to find cracks caused by corrosion in Hanford's double-shell radioactive waste tanks.

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A common way to check the inner walls is with ultrasonic waves. But until last year, the

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"It has performed very well," said Jim Castleberry, CH2M Hills' project leader.

■ Reporter John Stang can be reached at 582-1517 or via e-mail at [jstang@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:jstang@tri-cityherald.com).

24 AUG 03

# Contractor appeals ruling on cleanup

**By the Herald staff**

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Essentially, this is an appeal of an earlier appeal ruling.

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That 100-day review period is scheduled to end Dec. 2.

This is the latest salvo in a corporate battle over who should get a DOE contract to accelerate Hanford's river shore cleanup, to demolish and seal the site's old plutonium reactor complexes, and to clean up the 300 Area.

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Three corporate teams submitted bids in 2002 for the work, with DOE awarding that contract in April 2003 to Washington Closure Co. Washington Closure is a coalition of Washington Group International, Fluor Federal Services and Earth Tech.

In May, the team of Bechtel National and CH2M Hill filed an appeal of the decision to the GAO. The third team dropped out.

# DOE commits to lined trenches when burying low-level wastes

■ *Government officials will debate when practice will start*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy is committed to ending its practice of burying low-level radioactive waste at Hanford in unlined trenches, the department's cleanup czar, Jessie Roberson, said Thursday evening.

But how soon that will happen appears to be up for debate by government officials who met Thursday to discuss Hanford waste trenches.

Roberson, DOE's assistant secretary for environmental management, met with U.S. Reps. Jay Inslee, D-Wash.; Doc Hastings, R-Wash., and Dave Hobson, R-Ohio, chairman of the House Energy and Water Subcommittee.

"It's the first time the Department of Energy has made the commitment not to put low-level waste in unlined trenches," Inslee said Thursday night.

Before Thursday, DOE did not offer assurances that it would stop burying low-level waste immediately rather than continuing the practice for months or even years, Inslee said.

His understanding of Thursday's discussion

is that DOE will stop burying waste in unlined trenches within days of a record of decision being signed on an environmental study. The record of decision likely will be signed next month.

But Roberson said DOE has been holding discussions with regulators since March on alternatives to burying low-level waste in unlined trenches.

"We didn't just start," she said.

DOE's intention is to make the switch as soon as possible after a record of decision is issued.

But Roberson has placed two conditions on the switch.

The record of decision must not be challenged in court, and DOE has to have an agreement from regulators to make the change.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would need to agree to let low-level waste be buried at the Environmental Restoration and Disposal Facility, a huge lined landfill in central Hanford. It's now used for soil and rubble from cleanup projects along Hanford's Columbia River shoreline.

The state would have to agree to allow low-level waste to be buried in some smaller, mixed

See **DOE**, Page B2

27 Aug 03

## ■ *Fluor Hanford, DOE had 2002 deadline to begin moving sludge*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy is considering whether to replace Fluor Hanford with a new contractor on work to remove radioactive sludge at a major Hanford cleanup project.

Fluor and DOE were legally required to begin moving sludge from the K East Basin on Dec. 31, 2002, but the job still is not close to starting.

Two weeks ago, Fluor submitted a plan to DOE for fixing

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Robot expected to improve tank waste monitoring. **B1.**

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But on Tuesday, DOE sent a letter to Fluor saying the contractor's proposal is not detailed

enough, did not fix some problems, did not have adequate resources assigned to make it work and is not thoroughly mapped out.

The letter said DOE's Richland office has already given Fluor several opportunities to fix the problems.

Then DOE set a Sept. 5 deadline for Fluor to:

See **K East**, Page A2

# Hanford beats Tri-Party deadline to clean out vault

**By the Herald staff**

Hanford has finished cleaning out a 100-foot-long concrete vault slightly more than a month ahead of schedule, the Department of Energy and CH2M Hill

Hanford Group announced Thursday.

CH2M Hill finished pumping 18,000 gallons of radioactive wastes from four relatively small tanks in the 244-AR vault, located just north of the PUREX plant, to

Hanford's giant underground double-shell tanks.

And CH2M Hill also completed installing monitors and cutting and plugging all lines leading into and out of the vault.

The Tri-Party Agreement set a

Sept. 30 deadline to complete the job.

From 1968 to the early 1990s, the 244-AR vault was a midway stop in sending wastes from the now-closed PUREX and B plants to the site's underground tanks.



9 SEP 03

# Hanford Reach center moves ahead

■ *Richland PFD adopts budget, which will finance work through end of year*

**By Nathan Isaacs**

Herald staff writer

The Richland Public Facilities District adopted a 2003 budget Monday, marking a shift from planning to building the Hanford Reach interpretive center.

The \$645,627 budget accounts for work planned through the end of the year, including hiring an architect,

ment and restoring the environment at Columbia Point, where it will be built.

Construction is expected to begin Dec. 12.

The district is constructing the building in partnership with the city of Richland, the CREHST museum, the Friends of the Hanford Reach National Monument, Tri-Cities Visitors & Convention Bureau and various tribal partners. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also would be a partner.

The center is tentatively called the Hanford Reach National Monument Heritage and Visitor Center. District Chairman Bill Henderson said a more marketable name would likely be sought

and a local nickname also could stick.

"We toyed with a public contest, but that jury is still out," he said, referring to how to name the center.

He said the center is going to be world class with state-of-the-art exhibits and "needs to be named as effectively as possible."

"We got some very creative people on this," he said. "I think it's going to be dynamite."

The budget is expected to be modified in the coming months when the district sells an estimated \$4 million in bonds.

The district would pay off the bonds using money it gets from collecting

See **Center**, Page B2

# Hanford Advisory Board gives high marks

■ *Review of year's work  
celebrates progress  
despite looming problems*

**By Chris Mulick**

Herald staff writer

SEATTLE — A dispute over setting an enforceable schedule to get rid of radioactive garbage stored in drums at Hanford won't be settled out of court, state Ecology Director Tom Fitzsimmons said Thursday.

Agencies and stakeholders generally gave each other glowing marks in a Hanford Advisory Board review of a year's worth of cleanup activity, celebrating progress on removing spent nuclear fuel, ongoing construction of facilities to treat Hanford's most hazardous tank wastes and other efforts.

Fitzsimmons called it a "powerfully successful year."

But most discussions Thursday centered around looming problems.

The state Department of Ecology has taken the Department of Energy to court over a preliminary agreement. The state contends DOE reneged on providing firm deadlines to ship tons of transuranic wastes, which include contaminated tools and equipment.

DOE argues the state sought regulatory authority not allowed under federal law to oversee the wastes.

Waste shipments from other U.S. sites to Hanford for packaging have been halted while the lawsuit is considered.

"That continues to be a touchy issue for all parties," DOE Hanford Manager Keith Klein said.

Fitzsimmons, who along with Gov. Gary Locke and state Attorney General Christine Gregoire has been more than willing to play hardball with DOE, was more direct.

"Some of us thought we had a deal," Fitzsimmons said. "That isn't going to

13 Sep 03

# DOE fines

# CH2M Hill

## ■ \$82,500 fine levied for environmental safety violations

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy has fined contractor CH2M Hill Hanford Group \$82,500 for environmental safety violations at a Hanford tank farm where newer, double-shelled tanks hold radioactive waste.

Leak detectors at two tanks were accidentally shut off, and in another incident, tanks of clean water overflowed onto contaminated soil, potentially driving contamination deeper toward the ground water, according to DOE. In addition, the contractor failed to set up adequate controls to prevent trucks from driving near or over the tops of underground waste tanks.

Part of DOE's concern was that operators reported leak detectors were operating when they were not, and some workers who were aware of water spills decided not to report them, and were not forthcoming in investigations.

The problems, which occurred in August to November of 2002, were investigated in April by DOE.

However, over the past year changes in senior management have improved CH2M Hill's commitment to safety, wrote Stephen Sohinki, director of DOE's Office of Price-Anderson Enforcement, in a letter to the contractor. Because of the improvements, the fine was reduced by 50 percent.

According to DOE, the commitment to safety is new. Sohinki

See **Fines**, Page A2

# ■ *DOE, CH2M Hill* '16 SEP 03 *accused of not protecting workers from fumes*

**By Jeff St. John**

Herald staff writer

A watchdog group has accused the Department of Energy and Hanford contractor CH2M Hill Hanford Group of not protecting workers from chemical fumes from Hanford's underground waste tanks.

The Government Accountability Project released a report Monday alleging DOE's accelerated cleanup schedule has caused more CH2M Hill workers to be exposed to dangerous, and possibly carcinogenic, vapors leaking from wastes in Hanford's tank farms.

"Hanford tank workers are like canaries in a coal mine," Tom Carpenter, an attorney with the nonprofit group, said at a Richland news conference. "Money is driving Hanford cleanup, at the expense of worker health and safety."

## **Hanford**

DOE meets goal to remove tank waste. **B1.**

The report alleges CH2M Hill's equipment for monitoring vapor releases and workers' protective breathing equipment isn't sufficient to properly protect workers from toxic chemicals leaked from Hanford's waste tanks. Those include ammonia, benzene, volatile organic compounds and potentially radioactive particles.

From January 2002 to August 2003, 67 tank farm workers required medical attention for problems including headaches, nosebleeds, skin irritation, nausea, accelerated heart rate and breathing difficulty, the report said.

That rate has "skyrocketed," Carpenter said, compared with a period from 1987 to 1992 in which 16 vapor exposures were recorded at Hanford's tank farms — a rate of exposures that prompted major changes in safety procedures for tank farm workers.

The increase in the past 20 months shows DOE and CH2M Hill are encouraging faster tank farm cleanup at the expense of worker safety, Carpenter said. The report cited documents and interviews, some of them with anonymous sources, that he said indicate a pattern of resisting workers' concerns about health problems.

# <sup>27 AUG 03</sup> Battelle signs new PNNL contract

■ *Company can earn up to \$7.8 million in annual fees based on performance*

**By Annette Cary**  
Herald staff writer

Battelle signed a contract Tuesday worth an estimated \$2.5 billion to operate the Department of Energy's national laboratory in Richland through September 2007.

The contract uses a tougher grading system but increases the potential fees

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See **Contract**, Page A2

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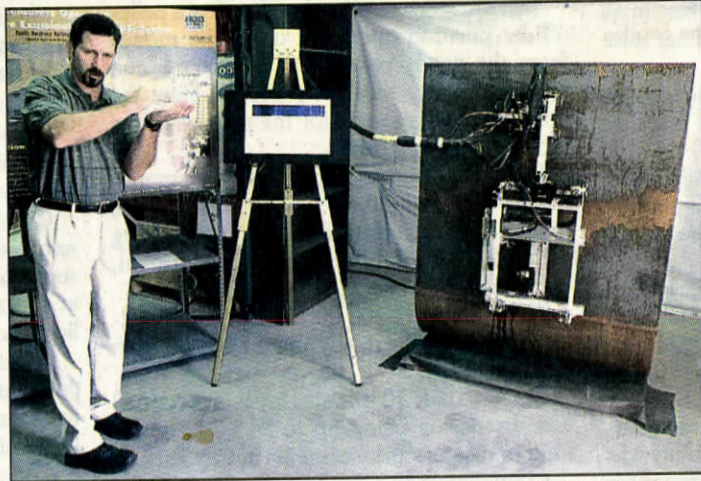
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Herald/Christina Stuart

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24 AUG 03

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By **Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

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See **DOE**, Page B2

27 AUG 03

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**B1.**

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Then DOE set a Sept. 5 deadline for Fluor to:

# Could spend time in fight for FFTF

16 SEP 03 4 OVER

**By Nathan Isaacs**

Herald staff writer

The next few days and weeks will be telling in the fight to save Hanford's test reactor.

The secondary loops on the Fast Flux Test Facility risk being corroded as the weather cools. There is debate on whether the reactor could be safely restarted after corrosion begins.

The Department of Energy has declined to turn on heaters that would protect the loops while the political debate on the reactor continues.

That amounts to a de facto decommissioning, said Benton County Commissioner Claude Oliver.

And he said it's reflective of the lack of support the cause has received from Washington's U.S. Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell.

And each cool night that passes is like another day closer to the reactor's demise.

Oliver believes he has the proof to prevent that from happening, but only if state and federal officials will hear him out. He recently returned from a cross country trip to Washington, D.C.

Along the way, Oliver stopped to talk to local politicians, scien-

tists, civic and labor groups and reporters.

In Washington, D.C., Oliver met with officials from DOE, the Office of the Inspector General, the White House and others to discuss why the government's own documents, which suggest a mission for FFTF, are being ignored.

Oliver and other FFTF advocates believe the fuel for the next generation of nuclear reactors can be tested with the reactor.

Advocates also believe FFTF could aid in the fight against cancer by producing medical isotopes.

Not using FFTF for those two objectives would be a waste of taxpayers' money and time, Oliver said.

Benton County is expected to have a public meeting on the issue Sept. 24 at the Benton County Justice Center in Kennewick.

Meanwhile, Oliver is meeting with leaders from local governments, businesses, labor unions and cancer fighters to map out the effort's next moves.

"It's not easy," he said. "But it's not by any stretch over."

■ Reporter Nathan Isaacs can be reached at 582-1556 or via e-mail at [nisaacs@tri-cityherald.com](mailto:nisaacs@tri-cityherald.com)

Kennewick could see 161 row houses, clustered on a hillside south of 45th Avenue under a development proposal approved by the planning commission.

Bruce Ratchford wants to build the cluster houses plus 146 conventional single-family homes on nearly 100 acres southeast of 45th Avenue and west of Olympia Street.

Commissioners voted 5-0 to approve a change in zoning from agriculture to residential that will allow construction of three homes per acre. The project property involves 231 acres, but only 99 acres would be developed as Inspiration Estates.

allow more flexibility in placing structures on the steep slopes.

Side yard setbacks can be as small as 5 feet, and front and yard setback can be 10 feet with the cluster housing. Lot sizes will be as small as 2,000 square feet, and the 45-foot minimum street frontages will not apply, she said.

Patterson said two community meetings were conducted during summer months with neighbors to the project area to learn about concerns.

Inspiration Estates will be on city water and sewer, but there will be no water available

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# County to meet with state on co

**By Nathan Isaacs**

Herald staff writer

Benton County Commissioner Leo Bowman expects to have a good idea after today on what the county and its cities will have to

newick. In July, Benton became the 10th county in the state to fall under the state law, required of counties with populations exceeding 150,000.

Counties and employers are required by law to work

in the county would be affected by the program.

Businesses receive tax credits in exchange for their participation. The county and cities, in the coming months, are expected to adopt ordinances

18 SEP 03

## ■ *Hanford money part of \$27.3 billion spending bill for energy, water projects*

**By Les Blumenthal**

Washington, D.C., bureau

WASHINGTON — The Senate has approved \$2.04 billion for the Hanford nuclear reservation, including money to keep the waste treatment plant on schedule.

The Hanford money was part of a \$27.3 billion spending bill for energy and water development projects approved 92-0 by the Senate late Tuesday.

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., a member of the Senate energy and water appropri-

ations subcommittee that wrote the bill, said she was satisfied with the level of Hanford money for the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1.

“The health and welfare of the families in the Tri-Cities will benefit from the Senate’s support for nuclear cleanup,” Murray said in a statement.

“I am glad that these funds will keep our federal obligation to the health and safety of those who sacrificed for our country.”

The House earlier approved funding for Hanford at approximately the same level.

House and Senate negotiators will resolve the differences in the two bills.

While the House bill failed to provide any money for the HAMMER safety training facility, the Senate measure provided \$7 million.

The Senate bill provided \$962.8 million for the Department of Energy's Richland Operations Office and \$1.079 billion for the Office of River Protection.

Murray said the money represents the federal share of the cleanup required under the Tri-Party Agreement and the department's accelerated energy program. The agreement among DOE, the state and the Environmental Protection Agency is the legal pact governing Hanford's cleanup.

The waste treatment plant is considered a crucial part of the cleanup effort.

It will turn millions of gallons of high-level radioactive waste currently held in leaking underground tanks into glasslike logs suitable for long-term storage.

Murray also criticized the administration for trying to change the definition of

high-level nuclear waste, a change that could leave more of the waste in the Hanford tanks.

Though a federal court blocked the department's effort to make the change administratively, DOE has asked Congress to legislate a new definition.

"I strongly urge the Department of Energy to get back to its job of cleaning up the waste, rather than wasting valuable time seeking congressional help over a lost court case," the senator said.

"The fastest, most effective way to clean up sites like Hanford is for the DOE to work in partnership with the states and federal regulators."

■ Reporter Les Blumenthal can be reached in Washington, D.C., at 202-393-2228 or via e-mail at [lblumenthal@mcclatchydc.com](mailto:lblumenthal@mcclatchydc.com).

# Vitrification alternatives unveiled

■ *CH2M Hill officials say technologies are promising*

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

Two technologies that heat radioactive waste show promise as an alternative to treating some waste that might otherwise be glassified at the vitrification plant under construction at Hanford, according to CH2M Hill Hanford Group.

The contractor has been studying three ways to dispose of some of the low-activity waste now stored in Hanford's underground tanks.

The two thermal processes — bulk vit-

some problems that would have to be overcome. But one is likely to be picked for further study in a pilot project.

The third method, cast stone, would allow too much radioactive material to leach into the soil, according to the study conducted for the Department of Energy. Conclusions were reached in part based on complex modeling done on Pacific Northwest National Laboratory's supercomputer.

The worst of the nuclear waste from Hanford's underground tanks will be melted into a glasslike material when the \$5.7 billion vitrification plant is completed. But the plant cannot process all the 53 million gallons of waste generated by 50 years of production of plutonium

DOE is interested in using alternative technologies to dispose of 10 million to 26 million gallons of low-activity waste.

But first it must prove to regulators that the product would be as environmentally safe as the glass logs of waste to be produced at the vit plant, or, in the project's catch phrase, "as good as glass."

A study led by CH2M Hill concluded the two alternative technologies that would heat the waste as part of the process to convert it to a safer form likely would work best.

The third technology studied would bind waste into containers of cast stone that's less porous than marble.

See **Unveiled**, Page B5

# DOE, Ecology discuss sending waste to WIPP

By Annette Cary

Herald staff writer

Sending some Hanford tank waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico instead of processing it at the vitrification plant being built at Hanford could save taxpayers \$500 million, according to contractor CH2M Hill Hanford Group.

Building the facility to process the waste was discussed at a public meeting Tuesday night in Kennewick held by the Department of Energy and the Washington Department of Ecology.

Several boards already have

agreed in principle to the proposal, including the Hanford Communities organization of local governments and the Hanford Advisory Board. They do have some concerns, such as making sure the waste qualifies as transuranic waste, which is the type WIPP accepts.

DOE is proposing that sludge left in eight of Hanford's 149 early single-shell tanks be processed as transuranic waste and shipped to a huge man-made, half-mile-deep cavern near Carlsbad, N.M., for permanent storage.

Unlike most of the waste produced by plutonium production and stored in Hanford's underground tanks, waste in eight of the tanks came from the late stages of a 1940s process. Most high-level waste was removed in the first step of processing spent fuel, and waste from further processing went to the eight tanks.

DOE is proposing building two mobile plants — processing could be done on a semi-trailer — to remove most of the water from the sludge. The damp substance that is left would be packed and shipped to New Mexico.

DOE is still in the early steps of gathering comments and gaining approval for the process, starting with applying for a state permit for a dangerous waste facility to package the waste.

Processing of the waste could begin as soon as October 2004 under the proposal. It could leave Hanford for permanent storage eight years earlier than if it were glassified at the vitrification plant, which is not expected to start treating waste until 2011.

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# 23 SEP 03 Manager for DOE returning to PNNL

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Mike Schlender recently left his job as the Department of Energy's deputy Hanford manager to return to Pacific Northwest National Laboratory after a more than six-year absence.

Schlender, 45, was a Battelle employee who was loaned to DOE's Richland office in January 2001 as deputy manager for site transition — one of two managers under DOE Hanford Manager Keith Klein. When the other deputy manager, Bob Rosselli, retired in 2002, Schlender became the Richland office's sole deputy manager.

"I can't overstate the impact that Mike has had on the (Richland office) and how much I have appreciated his leadership, skill and dedication. He has been instrumental in the success we've had over the last several years," Klein said in a recent memo to DOE employees.

Schlender rejoined PNNL on Sept. 15 as the lab's senior technical adviser for the deputy director of operations.

Jeannie Schwier, DOE's Richland office's assistant manager for administration, will be the acting deputy manager until a permanent replacement is selected.

Schlender did geotechnical work in Australia until he joined PNNL in 1992, where he handled several U.S. Department of Defense studies, plus engineering studies on cleaning up Hanford's Plutonium Finishing Plant.

Battelle transferred him to the Brookhaven National Laboratory on Long Island in 1997 when Battelle and the State University of New York at Stony Brook took over that lab. He took the DOE assignment after returning from Brookhaven.

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25 SEP 03

# DOE backs firm for cleanup contract

■ *Letter to GAO will support Washington Closure appeal*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy supports Washington Closure Co. in its quest to get the federal General Accounting Office to award Hanford's river corridor cleanup contract to the Boise-based team.

In a few days, DOE plans to send a letter to the GAO in support of Washington Closure's appeal of an Aug. 13 GAO ruling that gave two rivals second chances at the contract, said DOE spokeswoman Andrea Powell.

DOE wants to replace Hanford's current environmental restoration contract, which covers removing contaminated soils from Hanford's Columbia River shore plus demolishing and sealing old reactor complexes, with a new river corridor cleanup contract, which is supposed to speed up the soil and reactor work while also cleaning out the contaminated 300 Area.

Bechtel Hanford has had the current contract since 1994, posting 13 straight annual and semi-annual "outstanding" ratings.

Last April, DOE awarded the new contract to Washington Closure Co., a coalition of Washington Group International, Fluor Federal Services and Earth Tech. That team beat out two other groups led by Bechtel National and Tetra Tech FW.

In May, Bechtel appealed DOE's decision to the GAO. Bechtel claimed Washington Closure's winning bid of \$974 million significantly low-balled DOE's estimate that \$1.5 billion would be needed to do the work, and \$974 million is inadequate for the job. Washington Closure countered that the flexibility in its winning package will enable it to finish the work for about \$500 million less than DOE's estimate.

On Aug. 13, the GAO ruled in favor of Bechtel's appeal, recommending that DOE re-evaluate the bids and how the final decision was reached.

On Aug. 25, Washington Closure filed its own appeal with the GAO, requesting that it overturn the Aug. 13 ruling. The GAO has until Dec. 2 to rule on Washington Closure's appeal.

DOE supports Washington Closure's appeal because the federal agency believes the Boise-based team has the best bid, Powell said.

"We feel we made a sound contract award," she said.

25 Sep 03

# DOE seeks to trim FFTF shutdown cost

■ *Agency issues request for proposals for shutdown, hopes to lower cost by \$200 million*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy hopes to trim about \$200 million from a Fluor Hanford estimate of how much cleaning out and demolishing the Fast Flux Test Facility might cost.

In early July, Fluor concluded the total shutdown project would cost \$706 million and take until 2019 to accomplish.

On Monday, DOE issued a draft request for proposals for finishing shutdown of the dormant experimental reactor. It proposed a tentative target cost of \$500 million.

DOE wants a "small business" to take over FFTF's deactivation and decommissioning as part of its nationwide push to farm out several nuclear clean-up projects to

small businesses. A "small business" is defined as a company with fewer than 500 employees.

A big corporation, such as Fluor Hanford, can bid on the project as part of a team if a small business is the majority partner.

Fluor spokesman Geoff Tyree said the company is studying the draft request for proposals to figure out if it wants to join a team to compete for the new contract. Fluor is the current contractor in charge of FFTF.

After DOE gets feedback from the draft request, it plans to send out a final request for proposals in December, meaning the new contract likely will be awarded in early 2004.

DOE's draft request for proposals does not set a closure timetable, nor is the \$500 million target set in concrete. DOE is keeping the total costs partly open-ended to see what the potential bidders will estimate, said Andrea Powell, DOE spokeswoman.

However, DOE is setting a maximum annual budget of \$46.1 million for the project. That is the same annual figure that Fluor esti-

mated in June would be needed to finish the project by 2019.

The shutdown project is divided into a "deactivation" stage and a "decommissioning" stage.

Deactivation covers removing and processing FFTF's spent nuclear fuel and its liquid sodium coolant, plus the removal of its pipes and other equipment. Decommissioning will take place after deactivation and covers the demolition or entombment of the actual reactor buildings.

What FFTF will look like at the end of the project still is unknown.

DOE plans to conduct an environmental impact study to determine whether the main reactor building and containment dome will be entombed above ground or whether the main structure's equipment will be removed down to 3 feet beneath the ground's surface to be covered by some sort of cap at ground level.

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1 OCT 03

## **State, DOE stay quiet on waste dispute talks**

Both sides were closed-mouthed Tuesday about progress in the federal and state negotiations on legal disputes involving transuranic wastes at Hanford, which are scheduled to conclude today. The talks are over a dispute between the state and the Department of Energy over the handling of radioactive transuranic wastes, including transuranic wastes containing dangerous chemicals.

DOE has threatened to halt all Hanford work involving the chemical-laden wastes because of a Washington Department of Ecology order giving the state authority over those wastes. DOE wants to keep the final say over all transuranic wastes.

DOE and the state have filed federal lawsuits against each other on the issue but have put their litigation on hold for the duration of the talks. Today's deadline ends the third extension of those talks, which began in the spring.

# DOE seeks legislation to reclassify waste

28 Sep 03  
■ *Federal judge denied request 3 months ago*

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

In a closed-door congressional session, the Department of Energy is trying to get language inserted into legislation that will give it the power to reclassify untreated high-level radioactive tank waste into a less-dangerous category — without treating it. A federal judge denied DOE that

power three months ago.

DOE is trying to get the language added during a U.S. House-Senate conference committee, which is reconciling the two chambers' 2004 energy bills, according to the office of U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash.

This legislative maneuvering is prompted by a July 3 lawsuit ruling by U.S. District Judge B. Lynn Winmill in Boise.

Two environmental organizations and two Indian nations filed a federal lawsuit against DOE,

contesting DOE's claim that it can legally reclassify high-level radioactive tank wastes into low-activity radioactivity tank wastes prior to treatment. Four states, Washington, Oregon, Idaho and South Carolina, supported the plaintiffs' stance. Winmill ruled against DOE, which has appealed the ruling.

The wastes involved include 53 million gallons in Hanford's underground tanks, 34 million gallons in tanks at Savannah River, S.C., and 900,000 gallons

in tanks at Idaho Falls.

"Unfortunately, this tactic of fighting the states and trying to do an end run around the other partners in the cleanup is not new to this administration," Murray said. "The truth is that the fastest, most effective way to clean up these sites is for the DOE to work in partnership with the states and federal regulators."

Murray and Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., oppose DOE's attempt to claim those waste reclassification powers.

In a recent Senate water and energy committee meeting, Murray said: "I am concerned that this administration may try to change the ground rules so it could declare victory and walk away from (Hanford), without doing all the cleanup work that's required. That could happen if the administration changes the definition of high-level nuclear waste."

Cantwell press aide Charlotte

See **Waste**, Page B2

3 OCT 63  
■ *Agency should not be able to reclassify wastes, panel told*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The U.S. House told a Senate-House committee Thursday not to give the Department of Energy the authority to reclassify high-level radioactive tank wastes without treating it.

The House passed that "motion to instruct" with a unanimous voice vote.

A couple dozen representatives were actually present when the voice vote was taken, including U.S. Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Wash., who introduced the motion, and Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash.

**Hanford**

DOE, state extend talks on waste dispute. **B1.**

House session shows Hastings receiving

The nonbinding motion goes to the House-Senate conference committee that is trying to reconcile the two chambers' energy bills.

However, a transcript of Thursday's

assurances from the conference committee's leaders that they will not proceed with DOE's proposed legislation without agreements from Washington, Oregon, Idaho and South Carolina.

DOE is trying to get the conference committee to insert language into the energy legislation that will give DOE the

See **Proposal**, Page A2

# Officials push bills to study B Reactor

■ *Bills would order study of converting site into a museum*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Two members of Washington's congressional delegation introduced legislation Tuesday that calls for the National Park Service to study the feasibility of converting Hanford's B Reactor into a museum.

Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., and Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., introduced bills that, if passed, would order the Secretary of the Interior to tell the parks service to complete a study within a year.

Hanford's B Reactor is the world's first full-size nuclear reactor — a major leap beyond the tiny experimental laboratory reactors that preceded it.

B Reactor was built in less than two years as part of World War II's Manhattan Project. It created the plutonium that powered the first atomic bomb, which was detonated July 16, 1945, in New Mexico. Plutonium from B Reactor also was used in the atomic bomb that destroyed Nagasaki, Japan, on Aug. 9, 1945, to speed the end of World War II.

For at least 13 years, if not longer, local groups have worked to turn the defunct reactor into a museum. Right now, Hanford cleanup plans leave B Reactor intact while calling for demolition and sealing of the site's other eight plutonium-production reactor complexes.

Del Ballard, president of the B Reactor Museum Association, said the bills are a major step toward turning B Reactor into a museum because this is the first time Congress has gotten involved.

The bills also call for similar studies of Manhattan Project sites elsewhere.

"It is critical that our nation reflect on both the Manhattan Project's unprecedented engineering achievements, such as B Reactor, as well as the human and environmental costs of this initiative, which changed the course of world history," Cantwell said in a written statement.

In the same statement, Hastings said: "Its preservation would ... serve as a useful educational tool — especially for those generations who didn't live through World War II or the Cold War."

Last year, the Department of Energy said B Reactor's preservation should be incorporated into the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department's planning to manage the Hanford Reach National Monument. The monument land includes the B Reactor site near the Columbia River.

The Fish and Wildlife service and the National Park Service are parts of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

# Benton commissioners mum on FFTF

By Nathan Isaacs

Herald staff writer

Advocates for restarting Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility are baffled the Benton County commissioners won't support their cause despite evidence they believe calls for the need of the reactor.

The commissioners held a public meeting Wednesday to talk about the issue. No action was taken, but Chairman Max Benitz Jr. said it would be discussed at another meeting.

Benitz and Commissioner Leo Bowman declined to comment on the issue.

Commissioner Claude Oliver was asking the board to sign a resolution that, among other things, calls for the Department of Energy to turn on heaters that would prevent the reactor's drained secondary cooling loops from cracking in the chilly autumn weather.

Officials have said it is doubtful whether the reactor could be safely restarted if corrosion starts.

In an e-mail statement Thursday, Oliver wrote, "Max and Leo can choose roles of 'non-leadership' on the FFTF initiative even though the new national energy policy means

DOE is asking Congress for billions to build replacements necessary should the FFTF testing capability be lost as a national option.

"This battle is far bigger than a commissioner from Benton County. Leaders with the true focus of our national energy and health recognize the uniqueness of the FFTF and will continue the battle. My only request is that my fellow commissioners gracefully step aside where others will now lead."

State Rep. Shirley Hankins, R-Richland, said it's imperative to regain the support of the county commissioners.

The county had been a leader in the fight to save the reactor until earlier this year when commissioners decided to drop a federal appeal of a ruling allowing the reactor's shutdown.

After that the county's support shrank to sending letters to DOE and other federal officials asking for proper compliance on the reactor's deactivation and decommissioning.

And even that stopped in August when commissioners were asked to sign another resolution. Bowman joined Benitz in saying the reactor's demise was too far gone to be saved.

They said the county would not spend any more resources on the effort.

Not to be stopped, Oliver went on a cross-country trip earlier this month to Washington, D.C., to lobby support for the reactor.

FFTF was completed in 1978 and initial operation began in 1980 to test advanced nuclear fuels, materials, components, nuclear power plant operations and maintenance protocols and reactor safety designs, according to the Hanford Web site.

The decision to shut down the reactor came in 1993, also launching the battle to save it.

"I think the whole community should come to the floor and make people aware of the situation," said Camille Keyes of Pasco.

She and other FFTF advocates believe the reactor could aid in the fight against cancer by producing medical isotopes.

Also, they believe the reactor could be used to test fuel for the next generation of nuclear reactors.

"We can't afford not to have it," Keyes said.

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4 OCT 93

# State, DOE talks over transuranic wastes stall

**By the Herald staff**

The federal-state talks over legal disputes on radioactive transuranic wastes stored at, shipped to and moved from Hanford have been extended again. This time until Monday.

This is the third, one-working-day extension in the negotiations, which were scheduled to finish Wednesday.

The state and Department of Energy appear to agree on the main points, but each party's lawyers need to check the negotiators' work, said Sheryl Hutchison, spokeswoman for

Washington's Department of Ecology.

The talks are an attempt to resolve a feud between the DOE and the state over which has the final legal say on handling transuranic wastes at Hanford, including transuranic wastes laced with hazardous chemicals.

The talks came after DOE threatened to halt all Hanford work involving chemical wastes because of the state order claiming authority over chemical-laced transuranic wastes.

That order came after each side had filed a federal lawsuit against the other on this matter.

FRIDAY, OCT. 3, 2003

TRI-CITY HERALD

## Briefs

### **DOE, state extend talks on waste dispute**

The federal-state talks over legal disputes on transuranic wastes stored at, shipped to and from Hanford have been extended until today.

This was the second one-day extension in the negotiations, which were scheduled to finish Wednesday.

State negotiators are optimistic that a compromise can be reached, said Sheryl Hutchison, spokeswoman for Washington's Department of Ecology.

The talks are an attempt to resolve a feud between the Department of Energy and the state over which has the final legal say on handling radioactive transuranic wastes at Hanford, including transuranic wastes laced with hazardous chemicals.

The talks came after DOE threatened to halt all Hanford work involving chemical-laced wastes because of a state order claiming authority over those wastes.

That order came after each side had a filed a federal lawsuit against the other on this matter.

8 OCT 03

## ■ \$10.5 million to push lab as proteomics study center

**By Annette Cary**

Herald staff writer

The National Institutes of Health has awarded Pacific Northwest National Laboratory a \$10.5 million grant to establish the Richland lab as a worldwide center for proteomics research.

The grant designates the lab as an NIH research resource center. As a Department of Energy national laboratory, it's already a leader in the study of proteomics, or the proteins that carry out functions in cells, as they apply to microbes useful in environmental cleanup.

But the five-year grant will allow the lab to expand its role as a center for research into better understanding of the complex protein sets that allow human cells to function. Understanding the way cells work at the molecular level could lead to earlier detection of disease and more effective treatments.

It's the largest NIH grant received by the lab in its 38-year history.

The money will be used to continue to develop equipment and technologies invented at the lab that allow biologists to measure tiny amounts of proteins and observe changes in them. The grant also will be used to make the technology at the resource center in the Environmental Molecular Sciences Laboratory available for collaborations with scientists working on NIH research at other labs and universities.

18 Oct 03

## ■ *Hanford a EPA Superfund site, but cleanup budget comes from DOE, state study says*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

The drastic shrinking of a Superfund trust fund will not affect Hanford's cleanup efforts, said the Superfund's Northwest head administrator Tuesday.

Depending on whose numbers are quoted, an industry-financed trust fund paying for part of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund efforts has either run dry or is coming close to it.

Hanford is technically a Superfund site, but in reality is a Department of Energy cleanup project.

The only other Superfund site in the Tri-City area is the Pasco landfill, which is in the last stage of being cleaned up.

The Superfund is a federal program created in 1980 in which Congress appropriates money to the EPA for cleaning up specific sites. Part of the 1980 legislation included a tax on oil and chemical industries to build up a fund to help pay for those

cleanup efforts.

However, the legislation on the industrial tax expired in 1995 and never has been revived. Consequently, while most Superfund money in the 1980s and early 1990s came from this industry tax, that share has shrunk significantly since 1995. Therefore, more and more of the Superfund money is coming out of the nation's general taxpayer-funded revenues.

The Washington Public Interest Research Group called attention Tuesday to the industry-paid trust fund running out of money.

"Without the money in the trust fund, taxpayers now will have to foot virtually all of the Superfund program costs," said WASHPIRG attorney Mo McBroom.

WASHPIRG contends the trust fund is empty as of today, which is the beginning of the federal fiscal 2004.

In 1995, this Superfund trust fund had about \$3.6 billion, according to the Sept. 14 Washington Post. On Sept. 2, the federal General Accounting Office said \$370 million was available in fiscal 2002. The Washington Post story said \$28 million is left in the trust fund.

Meanwhile, Congress has appropriated

about \$1.3 billion annually over the past few years to the EPA's nationwide Superfund cleanup efforts. About 5 percent of that goes annually to projects in the Northwest, said Mike Gearheard, the EPA's Superfund director for the Northwest.

But because Hanford is a federal project and not a corporate program, its cleanup money comes from congressional allocations to the Department of Energy.

Hanford's cleanup budget is close to \$2 billion annually, compared with all EPA Superfund projects collecting about \$1.3 billion annually.

"The Hanford site alone dwarfs (the Superfund program)," Gearheard said.

WASHPIRG calculated that the disappearance of the trust fund's cash will add to the tax burden of Washington's residents.

Washington's taxpayers contributed about \$7.1 million to Superfund cleanups in 1995, WASHPIRG calculated. That amount is expected to increase to between \$25.9 million and \$29.8 million in 2004, WASHPIRG contended.

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## **Bechtel vendor forum scheduled Tuesday**

11 OCT  
03

Bechtel National Inc. has scheduled a forum for upcoming procurement and subcontract opportunities on design and construction of the Waste Treatment Plant Project at 5 p.m. Tuesday at 3000 George Washington Way in Richland.

Space is limited to the first 150 because of room capacity. To register, visit the Web site [www.ebechtel.com](http://www.ebechtel.com) and click the Hanford Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant link, send an e-mail to [tlwallac@bechtel.com](mailto:tlwallac@bechtel.com), or call 371-2705

8 Oct 03

# Backers of FFTF to begin campaign

■ *'Woman to Woman'*  
*to give females education*  
*on effort to restart lab*

**By Nathan Isaacs**

Herald staff writer

Supporters of Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility are expected to soon launch an information campaign aimed at getting more women knowledgeable on the effort to restart the reactor.

The campaign, tentatively called "Woman to Woman," coincides with the group's announcement it believes it has through Thanksgiving to change opinions on the need for the reactor.

Advocates believe the reactor has several missions, including providing medical isotopes to be used to fight cancer and as a test platform for the next generation of nuclear reactors.

Meanwhile, Department of Energy contractors continue work on the deactivation and decommissioning of the reactor.

Wanda Munn, a former Richland city councilwoman and a retired FFTF engineer, said Monday that the Thanksgiving deadline is when autumn temperatures are expected to be cold enough to cause minute material changes to the reactor's drained, outer coolant loops.

Those changes, or cracks, could happen on miles of metal piping, which would make a restart very difficult and cost prohibitive, Munn said.

Up to now, "We have not had cold enough nights to cause problems," she said.

The Department of Energy has declined to turn on heaters that would protect the loops while the political debate on the reactor continues.

Getting those heaters turned on is an immediate goal of FFTF advocates, Munn said.

It's also one reason why advocates are creating the "Woman to Woman"

# DOE to spend \$1.4 billion for 'supplemental technologies'

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy is aiming to spend about \$1.4 billion on "supplemental technologies" for treating Hanford's radioactive tank wastes through 2028.

"Supplemental technologies" are the methods being studied to deal with Hanford tank wastes that won't be converted into glass with melters.

Right now, DOE and contractor CH2M Hill Hanford Group plan to continue studies on two such methods — bulk vitrification and steam reforming.

The Hanford Advisory Board's tanks committee discussed Hanford's plans for

supplemental technologies with DOE and state officials Thursday.

Hanford has 11 million gallons of high-level radioactive wastes and 42 million gallons of low-activity radioactive wastes in 177 underground tanks. Originally, Hanford expected to glassify the entire amount.

However, DOE and contractor Bechtel Hanford have determined that the glassification complex under construction can handle all the high-level wastes, but only 17 million to 25 million gallons of the low-activity wastes by a legal deadline of 2028.

That means Hanford has to find methods to treat the remaining 17 million to 25 million gallons of low-activity

wastes by 2028 — in ways that meet the state's regulatory approval. Another option is to add more low-activity waste melters to the present complex under construction.

One method being studied is steam reforming, which uses heat and chemicals to convert wastes into pebble-size crystals. The other method is bulk vitrification, which is pouring wastes into a huge portable container, sticking some electrodes in it, and zapping the material into glass.

CH2M Hill, which is studying the alternative technologies, calculated that using bulk vitrification for all the remaining wastes would cost \$1.2 billion to \$1.3 billion through 2028. CH2M Hill

also calculated that steam reforming all the remaining wastes would cost \$900 million to \$1.3 billion through 2028.

DOE has budgeted \$1.4 billion for building and operating the supplemental technologies' facilities through 2028, according to figures discussed Wednesday.

By comparison, the budget to build and crank up the glassification complex through 2011 is \$5.7 billion.

The next step is for CH2M Hill to enter into contracts with some companies by Dec. 1 so those firms can build and operate test facilities to see whether steam reforming or bulk vitrification are feasible at Hanford and can treat the wastes as well as conventional glassifi-

cation with melters.

DOE is supposed to have all the data from those test runs ready to send to Washington's Department of Ecology by Jan. 31, 2005. After that, state and federal experts will try to determine how to deal with the remaining 17 million to 25 million gallons of wastes, either through steam reforming, bulk vitrification, adding conventional low-activity waste melters or some combination of the three options.

Construction of any supplemental technology facilities or extra melter facilities will likely begin after 2006.

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9 OCT 03

# CH2M Hill addressing tank vapor exposures

■ *Officials aim to regain trust  
between managers, workers*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

CH2M Hill Hanford Group is trying to improve how it deals with exposures to tank waste vapors, Hanford officials said Wednesday.

Those efforts include trying to regain some trust lost between managers and workers over the matter, those officials said.

"There have been some instances where we feel we may have lost that trust," said John Swailes, the Department of Energy Office of River Protection's assistant manager for tank farms.

Swailes and Joel Eacker, CH2M Hill's vice president to project delivery, briefed two Hanford Advisory Board committees on the subject.

From Jan. 1 through Sept. 30, 40 tank farm workers have reported being exposed to vapors coming from central Hanford's underground tanks filled with radioactive and chemical wastes, according to CH2M Hill. About 19 workers reported similar exposures in 2002.

CH2M Hill's figures said that in 2002, 13 exposed workers needed no medical treatment, five required only first-aid help and one was serious enough to be marked as a "recordable" accident under federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration rules.

In 2003, 22 exposed workers did not need medical treatment, 15 required first aid, two were serious enough to be classified as OSHA recordable accidents and one was exposed seriously enough to lose at least one day of work, which also is noted by OSHA, according to CH2M Hill.

Wednesday's discussion came three weeks after the Government Accountability Project, a whistleblowers advocacy



# Fluor's electrical safety plan under review

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford is cranking up its fix-it work to deal with a summertime rash of electrical safety violations.

The electrical safety program under review is known as the "lock-and-tag" or "lock-out/tag-out" procedures.

When Hanford employees check, repair and replace equipment with electrical lines, it is standard procedure to shut off the power to that equipment so workers won't get shocked or electrocuted. The procedure includes documentation plus special tags put on the appropriate switches to warn people against activating them.

Fluor recently submitted a company-wide lock-and-tag safety program to the Department of Energy's Richland office in an attempt to consolidate the corporation's numerous procedures into one universal policy.

Rob Hastings, director of DOE's Richland office's operations oversight division, briefed a Hanford Advisory Board committee Wednesday on Fluor's remedial plans.

In fiscal 2002, Fluor recorded 14 lock-and-tag violations.

In fiscal 2003, which ended

See **Safety**, Page B7

10 OCT 05

## ■ Firm asks DOE for extra 10 months to remove sludge

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford has asked the Department of Energy for an extra 10 months to remove radioactive sludge from the K West Basin.

DOE has not decided whether to support Fluor's request, which would eventually lead to a proposed change in the Tri-Party Agreement, said Larry Earley, DOE's Hanford spent fuel project leader.

On Wednesday, Earley briefed the Hanford Advisory Board's river and plateau committee on the project's status.

The K Basins are two leak-prone indoor pools that once held 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel 400 yards from the Columbia River. Fluor is removing the fuel, processing it and trucking it to an

underground vault in central Hanford.

Fluor is expected to beat the legal Tri-Party Agreement deadline to remove the spent fuel but is lagging in removing 78 cubic yards of highly radioactive sludge.

The Tri-Party Agreement called for starting sludge removal by the end of 2002. Fluor hopes to actually begin moving sludge in late November, but appears to be one or two weeks behind that target, Earley said.

Because of the delay, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency fined DOE and Fluor \$76,000 last spring. The EPA has not decided if it will impose more fines. Meanwhile, DOE hinted in August that it's considering replacing Fluor on the sludge removal.

The 11-month delay is partly due to Fluor concentrating on moving fuel while delaying sludge removal.

Another reason for the delay has been a technical problem in putting the sludge

into an enclosed container fast enough to prevent the sludge's uranium from reacting with the water's oxygen and hydrogen components, creating a potentially flammable combination.

Fluor believes it has recently solved that problem by replacing the helium gas in the containers with argon gas, which should speed up the packing process and head off the flammability threat.

Fluor believes it can start sludge removal in time to move the 65 cubic yards in the K East Basin to a T Plant storage site by the Tri-Party Agreement deadline of Aug. 31, 2004.

But that date is also the deadline to finish moving the 13 cubic yards of sludge in the K West Basin, which Fluor believes it cannot accomplish in time unless it buys and sets up extra equipment, which would boost costs. So the company asked DOE for an extension until June 30, 2005, to complete the K

West work. The rest of the K Basins project appears to be close to its timetable. HAB committee members said although the overall project has hit some snags, they are happy completion is near and is being finished close to the Tri-Party Agreement schedule.

Here's the status of other K Basin work:

■ Fluor expects to finish moving 2,300 tons of fuel by May 31, two months ahead of deadline.

■ The Tri-Party Agreement requires Fluor to move 1,781 tons by Dec. 31. That target is obtainable, said Larry Gadbois of the EPA.

■ The deadline for moving fuel from the K East Basin to K West is May 31. Fluor hopes to finish in January. Earley believes March is more realistic.

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# Federal judge weighs fate of Hanford explosion suit

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

A federal judge is considering whether a lawsuit filed by 13 former Plutonium Finishing Plant workers should be sent to a mediator, and whether the suit should be dismissed against Kadlec Medical Center and an emergency room doctor.

In a Friday hearing, U.S. District Judge Ed Shea said that the mediation decision might depend on whether an appropriate mediator is free to hear the case.

The plaintiffs want a mediator, while the defense believes it is premature to go to mediation.

Shea expects to rule on Kadlec's and the doctor's dismissal motions in about a week.

Thirteen current and former Hanford employees are suing Fluor Hanford, some subcontractors, Kadlec Medical Center and emergency room physician Dr. John Smith over numerous mistakes made before and after a PFP chemical tank exploded May 14, 1997, according to court documents. The explosion exposed the workers to chemical fumes, possibly tainted with radioactivity.

Filed in 2000, the lawsuits say Fluor and others allowed the explosion to occur, botched the emergency responses, and delayed medical checks on the victims.

The victims say they have suffered recurring skin rashes, lung and throat problems, blood abnormalities, post-traumatic stress disorder and some other ailments because of the fumes and delayed medical checks.

On Friday, attorneys for Kadlec and Smith argued that their clients should be dropped as defendants.

The plaintiffs have not been able to show that any actions or nonactions at Kadlec contributed to their health problems, Kadlec's

attorney, John King, and Smith's attorney, Robert Hailey, argued.

Plaintiffs' attorney Todd Johnson and Scott Johnson argued otherwise.

Shea said he needs to review the deposition of one of the plaintiffs' medical experts before making his ruling.

When the victims were sent to Kadlec on the night of May 14, 1997, they asked that the emergency room workers take blood, urine and fecal samples from them because they were worried about being exposed to chemical fumes.

Emergency room workers did not take those samples because the physical exams indicated they were not needed, the defense attorneys argued.

Also, despite having a room permanently set up in 1997 to deal with nuclear-related accidents, the victims were not given showers at Kadlec. Showers are a common Hanford procedure for washing off contaminants in the immediate aftermath of an accident.

There is no evidence that Kadlec had protocols written up in 1997 to deal with Hanford waste-related accident victims brought to its emergency room, attorneys for both sides said. However, Kadlec has those protocols in place now, said Jim Hall, hospital spokesman.

King and Hailey argued that in 1997, no hospital in Washington was legally required to have protocols for dealing with radioactive material accidents, and that the University of Washington's hospital was the only one in the state that had protocols for dealing with hazardous wastes accidents.

Shea noted that Kadlec, unlike the rest of the state's hospitals, is next to a highly contaminated nuclear cleanup site, which might call for having protocols written up for radioactive accidents.

Hailey and King contended that Kadlec and Smith should not be held to higher legal standards than faced by the rest of the state's emergency rooms.

Also, Kadlec did not have a formally written agreement with Hanford on providing care for the site's radiation and chemical accident victims until 1998, they said.

Plaintiffs' attorney Todd Johnson argued that Kadlec had decontamination equipment available in its room set aside for nuclear-related emergencies, but did not use it that night.

Todd Johnson also argued that blood, fecal and urine samples should have been taken that night to start accurately tracking any chemicals or radioactive substances that the victims may have inhaled or absorbed. The first such tests were given 42 hours later at the Hanford Environmental Health Foundation.

"Nobody ever cared about these individuals from the get-go, and about what could be done for them. ... These people are in terrible shape because, even today, they don't know what they were exposed to," Johnson said.

In the late 1990s, the state fined the Department of Energy, Fluor and a subcontractor \$110,000 for safety violations that caused the explosion. And DOE fined Fluor \$28,500 for the botched emergency response. The explosion led to a massive overhaul of Hanford's chemical management and emergency procedures.

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# BNFL awarded contract to build cleanup machines

■ *Equipment will be used to remove K West Basin sludge*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

A team led by BNFL Inc. will design and build equipment to remove highly radioactive sludge from Hanford's K West Basin.

Fluor Hanford recently awarded a estimated \$5 million contract for that job to BNFL, Fluor announced Monday.

What is happening is Hanford might end up with different technical approaches

in removing the radioactive sludges from the K East Basin and the K West Basin.

The K Basins are two leak-prone indoor pools that once held 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel near the Columbia River. Hanford is removing the fuel, processing it and trucking it to a safer underground vault in central Hanford.

Fluor is two months ahead of schedule on meeting the legal deadline of July 31, 2004, to have all 2,300 tons moved.

But Fluor is lagging in meeting the legal deadline of Aug. 31, 2004, to move 65 cubic yards of radioactive sludge from

the K East Basins and 13 cubic yards of sludge from the K West Basin to a storage site at Hanford's T Plant.

Fluor thinks it can move the 65 cubic yards of K East sludge by Aug. 31, but it is asking DOE for an extra 10 months to deal with the K West sludge. DOE has not decided yet whether to agree.

The legal deadline to start removing the sludge from K East was the end of last year, but Fluor and DOE don't expect that removal to begin until later this year — about 11 months behind schedule.

Fluor had to rethink, redesign and

rebuild its equipment for removing the loose sludge from the K East Basin and pack it within specialized containers fast enough. Speed is needed so the highly radioactive uranium in the water-logged sludge does not have time to break down the water into a potentially flammable combination inside a closed, pressurized container.

Meanwhile, the technical approach to removing the much smaller volume of K West sludge has to be studied because there are some differences from the K East environment, said Kent Smith, Fluor's director for the sludge retrieval

and disposition project.

The K West sludge has a higher concentration of uranium than the K East sludge. And the K West sludge is mostly within pipes and equipment, while the K East sludge is mostly on the pool's floor.

BNFL's job is to study whether different sludge retrieval methods are needed for the K West Basin, and to design and build equipment to accomplish that.

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# DOE hopes to have FFTF completely closed by 2012

## ■ Officials plan to award cleanup contract next year

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The Department of Energy hopes to finish closing off Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility by 2012 — a tentative date that easily could change.

DOE hopes to set up a shutdown contract lasting eight years, but that time period could change once DOE receives and reviews proposals to continue work to close the dormant research reactor, said Jay Augustenborg, a DOE official on the contract selection board.

That means the contract could run for more or less than eight years, depending on the best bid proposal. DOE expects to award the contract in 2004.

Last week DOE discussed the contract with at least 46 companies, which will likely team with other firms to handle the entire contract.

DOE won't know how interested the firms are until it issues a final request for proposals Dec. 15 and receives bids by Feb. 12, Augustenborg said.

If there are no complicated discussions of contract changes or comparisons, DOE expects to award the contract by June 30. If complicated follow-up talks are needed, the deadline could extend to October 2004, he said.

DOE is seeking a "small business" to take over the shutdown as part of its nationwide push to farm out several nuclear-related cleanup projects to small businesses — companies with fewer than 500 employees.

Right now, Fluor Hanford is shutting

down FFTF. As a major corporation, Fluor can participate in the new contract only as a subcontractor.

FFTF's shutdown includes removing super-heated liquid sodium from its primary cooling loops, removing spent nuclear fuel, removing contaminated pipes and equipment, processing radioactive materials and transporting them elsewhere, possibly tearing down some buildings and possibly sealing up the reactor building.

DOE plans to conduct an environmental impact study on what the final state of the decommissioned complex should be.

Weapons Complex Monitor, a Washington, D.C., newsletter, recently raised the question of whether potential bidders will know how much work Fluor will have done when the new contract teams take over. That may affect bidders' calculations

on schedules and budgets, the Monitor said.

Augustenborg said bidders will be kept up to date on Fluor's progress and its impacts. Bidders will work from DOE's predicted annual project budget of \$46.1 million.

Although eight years of \$46.1 million annual budgets equal almost \$369 million, DOE speculates the overall price tag could reach \$500 million.

Meanwhile, Fluor calculated in July that a \$46.1 million annual FFTF shutdown budget could cost \$706 million overall and stretch the work out until 2019.

Augustenborg said DOE reviewed Fluor's calculations and concluded costs could be trimmed to \$500 million.

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## **PNNL supercomputer ranks No. 5 in world**

Pacific Northwest National Laboratory's new supercomputer has been ranked No. 5 on the top 500 list of the fastest computers in the world, as scientists at the Richland lab had predicted.

The Top 500 List ranks computers based on their performance running a benchmark called Linpack, which is a method to measure a machine's ability to solve a set of dense linear equations.

The supercomputer had ranked eighth on the list this summer as it ramped up to full power. It became fully operational in September.

PNNL scientists will use the supercomputer in studies related to fundamental sciences, environmental quality, energy resources and national security. Large blocks of computing time are granted to multi-institutional research teams on a competitive proposal basis.

16 OCT 03

# Cantwell asks DOE to pay up

■ *10-year-old debt to state stands at \$6.8 million*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell has asked the Department of Energy to pay a 10-year-old debt of \$6.8 million to Washington state.

Cantwell, D-Wash., sent a letter to Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham, telling him to send "without further delay" the payment-equal-to-taxes.

The money is due from the late 1980s when Hanford was one of three sites being considered for a national repository for nuclear wastes. Eventually, DOE picked Yucca Mountain, Nev., to receive commercial spent nuclear fuel and federal high-level radioactive wastes from across the nation.

Under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982, states being considered for the repository were entitled to receive federal money equal to the taxes a private company would have paid for sampling and studying a site for a nuclear waste repository.

Washington levied such a payment against DOE in 1993 to make up the equivalent of unpaid state business and occupation taxes.

With interest, that has grown to \$6.8 million.

"For 10 years, (DOE's Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management) has denied responsibility for paying Washington's Business and Occupation Tax for activities carried out at the Hanford reservation," Cantwell wrote.

Her letter said DOE's Office of Hearings and Appeals ruled on June 25, 2002, and on July 16, 2003, that DOE must make the payment.

Cantwell's letter told DOE to explain why it has not paid the money and asks when it will.

DOE officials in Washington, D.C., were unavailable to comment on the issue Wednesday.

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# Sen. Hale asks DOE to protect FFTF workers' retirements

By Chris Mulick

Herald Olympia bureau

OLYMPIA — State Sen. Pat Hale has sent a letter to the Department of Energy appealing for greater protections for workers at Hanford's Fast Flux Test Facility, who she says may lose an opportunity to maximize their retirement benefits.

Workers at the facility have told Hale,

R-Kennewick, that the agency's request for proposals to take on deactivation of the shutdown research reactor could leave them starting new retirement plans under a new contractor.

The average age of the nearly 200 FFTF workers is near 50.

"These people are too young to retire and too old to build the years of services they would need for an adequate pension with a new company," Hale said.

Hale wrote DOE Hanford Manager Keith Klein this week.

In an interview, Hale said she is confident DOE headquarters in Washington, D.C., is to blame for omitting greater protections for workers, not DOE officials in Richland.

She wants the workers grandfathered into the their retirement plans with whichever contractor is selected.

Because the DOE request for proposal

is only a draft document, it could be modified.

"A lot of those people have worked there for the bulk of their professional careers," Hale said. "It's just not fair."

Hale said she wouldn't object if other contractors demonstrate they can do the work with fewer people, but she said in her letter that workers shouldn't be penalized simply because the agency wants to change contractors.

And with other Hanford contracts also coming due, Hale said she hopes the agency isn't setting a precedent.

"This could be the crack in the door," said Hale, who sent her letter Thursday. "At least it will send a message that it's not going unnoticed."

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18 OCT 03

# Fluor Hanford to lay off 80 workers

■ *Company says it is in new phase of 'cleanup mission'*

**By Jeff St. John**

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford Inc. announced Friday that it will lay off 80 people in the near future, adding to the approximately 320 employees who have involuntarily lost their jobs this year.

The layoffs were announced in a memo to employees from Dave Van Leuven,

Fluor Hanford president and chief executive. He attributed them to a "new phase in our cleanup mission" at Hanford as the company nears completion of stabilizing plutonium at the Plutonium Finishing Plant and removing spent fuel rods from K Basins, and moves toward deactivation and decommissioning work.

Geoff Tyree, Fluor spokesman, said Friday that no information was available on which employees would be laid off, which departments would see cuts or when the layoffs would take place. He

said the company would provide further information within the next two weeks.

Since the first of the year, Fluor has laid off 323 employees, and another 281 have left on a voluntary basis or through retirement, Tyree said. The company, Hanford's lead cleanup contractor and the site's largest firm, also has hired about 260 people in that time, he said.

The previous job reductions have come predominantly from Fluor's administrative departments, as the company has shifted workers from administrative tasks

to on-the-ground cleanup work. The cuts took place in three stages from last December through May.

"I understand that these changes are distracting and unfortunate," Van Leuven said in his memo, "but are necessary for our cleanup mission at Hanford."

As of Friday, Fluor employed 4,166 people, said Judy Connell, director of communications and public involvement.

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19 Oct 03

# Groups willing to mediate with DOE

## ■ Agency to continue to ask Congress for naming powers

By John Stang

Herald staff writer

The winners of a lawsuit that defeated the Department of Energy's attempt to claim broad, radioactive waste reclassification powers say they are willing to take the dispute to a mediator.

DOE's stance on mediation: Unknown.

However, DOE still is trying to convince Congress to grant it those broad reclassifi-

cation powers in the next several weeks, despite opposition by the U.S. House, four states that would be affected by those powers, and a federal judge's ruling.

This dispute revolves around high-level radioactive wastes in underground tanks at Hanford, Idaho Falls, Idaho, and Savannah River, S.C.

DOE has claimed it has the legal power to declare some high-level radioactive tank wastes as low-activity wastes prior to treating the material.

Two environmental organizations and two Indian nations challenged that claim

in federal court. The states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and South Carolina filed briefs in support of the plaintiffs.

On July 3, U.S. District Court Judge B. Lynn Winmill in Boise ruled against DOE.

Then DOE appealed Winmill's ruling to the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

As a routine part of the appeals process, both sides had until Oct. 10 to file paperwork to say whether they would be willing to take the dispute to a mediator instead of arguing before the appellate court. Each side is legally allowed to keep its filed answer on this question confidential.

The winning plaintiffs filed paperwork saying they are willing to go to a mediator, said Geoffrey Fettus, an attorney with the National Resources Defense Council, one of the plaintiffs.

On Thursday, DOE spokesman Joe Davis said he did not know what answer DOE filed Oct. 10 on the mediation question, but that he would find out. Davis could not be reached for comment Friday.

Fettus said DOE has not informed the plaintiffs on its stance toward mediation.

See **DOE**, Page B2

19 OCT 03

# *PNNL official says hydrogen is answer, but obstacles remain*

**By Jeff St. John**

Herald staff writer

**M**oe Khaleel sees a future world with cars, trucks, homes and businesses running smoothly and emissions-free on the fuel of the future — hydrogen.

But he also sees plenty of obstacles, both technical and economic, that need to be overcome before that future can arrive in American driveways.

Khaleel, director of Pacific Northwest National Laboratory's Hydrogen and Transportation programs, laid out some of the key issues for the future hydrogen economy in a lecture last week at Columbia Basin College in Pasco.

"We need dramatic technologies beyond business as usual," he said, to overcome the future prospects of declining fossil fuel supplies and increasing carbon dioxide emissions, which are believed to cause global warming.

The answer is hydrogen, Khaleel said. "Hydrogen is nontoxic, renewable and clean to use," and it has the highest energy content per pound of any known fuel, he said.

The 50 million tons of hydrogen produced worldwide each year is mostly used in fertilizer production, petroleum refining and other industrial uses, though it's also used as rocket fuel for space programs, Khaleel said. But its most promising future use will be in fuel cells, he said.

20000003  
■ *Hanford critic says Columbia River salmon threatened*

**From the Herald staff and news services**

A maverick scientist who once sent radioactive jam to Washington's governor claims radiation is on the rise near salmon spawning areas in the Columbia River.

Norm Buske says he's detected radium-225, a decay product of uranium-233, in the Hanford Reach, where 80 percent of the Columbia's fall chinook salmon spawn.

Buske is a Belfair-based independent scientist and Hanford critic who often works with Government Accountability Project, a Washington, D.C.-based public interest group with an office in Seattle.

Over the past decade, his work regularly has sparked controversy, and he has been arrested for trespassing at Hanford.

Scientists from the Hanford nuclear reservation and the state Health Department dispute Buske's current report, published last week with a grant from GAP, an organization of nuclear critics that defends government whistleblowers.

Debra McBaugh, a radiation specialist with the Washington Department of Health, said the sampling methods Buske used in his latest study are nonstandard and have not been reviewed by peers.

"We've been sampling since the 1960s out there. If uranium (or radium) had been there in large amounts, we would have seen it," she said.

Since 2001, Buske has had access to the 586-square-mile Hanford site in an agreement between GAP and the Department of Energy.

Buske's latest report surmises that about 22 pounds of uranium may have been dumped in the Columbia River at old ferry crossings near the defunct D Reactor.

He suspects it was dumped because it contained dangerous fluoride and didn't meet requirements for on-site disposal in tanks or soil.

# FFTF supporters launch 'Woman to Woman' drive

By Nathan Isaacs

Herald staff writer

Shirley Hankins and Wanda Munn say they've got their tennis shoes on and are ready for a campaign to restart Hanford's dormant nuclear test reactor.

The sneakers refer to Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., who successfully campaigned her way to a U.S. Senate seat as the "mom in tennis shoes."



Munn



Hankins

State Rep. Hankins, R-Richland, and Munn, a former Richland city councilwoman, want the same success in trying to get Murray and Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., to join them in a campaign called "Woman to Woman."

Organized labor, businesses, farmers, local politicians, doctors, scientists and cancer patients have failed to get the senators to restart the reactor, they said. Maybe women can make a difference.

"We have never lost any of the technical wars with respect to the Fast Flux Test Facility,"

Munn said. "The challenge we have is a political one. We've known that from the start.

"I'm here to tell you, woman to woman and woman to man, we're not going to go away. There is no quit in our minds. The future of the Fast Flux Test Facility is the future of this community."

Advocates believe the reactor has several missions, including providing medical isotopes to be used to fight cancer and as a test platform for the next generation of nuclear reactors.

Munn said elected female politicians and leaders in the community are planning to caravan to Olympia in early November to save the reactor. And there is a chance they'll try to make a trip to Washington, D.C.

Other female politicians on board and attending a news conference Thursday at the offices of Citi-

zens for Medical Isotopes included Richland's Carol Moser and Franklin County's Sue Miller. Also in attendance was Sandy Matheson, Tri-Citizen of the Year.

However, Department of Energy contractors continue work on the deactivation and decommissioning of the reactor. DOE is hoping to award next year a contract worth about \$500 million to completely shut down the reactor by 2012.

FFTF advocates are working against an unknown deadline, tentatively Thanksgiving, but that could come as quickly as the next cold weather front. The cold weather, specifically the damage it could do to the reactor's drained, outer coolant loops, could make a restart difficult and cost prohibitive.

Munn said the priority for advocates is to get DOE to turn on heaters to protect the loops.

It's why they need the senators, Munn said. "We can't get there without the senators."

But they are unlikely to get that support.

Charla Neuman, a spokeswoman for Cantwell, said the senator's position hasn't changed and that is that it's up to the Secretary of Energy to decide to restart FFTF.

However, she said she would reconsider the position if FFTF supporters had new information.

Murray's position also isn't likely to change, said spokesman Todd Webster.

"The Bush administration has made the decision to decommission the FFTF," Webster said. "It's hard to imagine that any man, woman, vegetable or mineral could get them to change their minds."

FFTF supporters want the two senators, Gov. Gary Locke and U.S. Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., to request the Department of Energy to: protect the drained loops; plan a meeting with DOE, the Department of Health and Human Services, White House representatives, community representatives and others to discuss and define FFTF's missions; and complete a court-ordered environmental impact study on the decommissioning of the reactor.

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## DOE issues

► Nevada disposal site won't be ready until 2010. **A8.**

► Fluor Hanford president's position under consideration. **B1.**

s for cleaning up a Hanford's transuranic

and chemical wastes.

The agreement, which covers contaminated junk buried or stored above ground in barrels, untangles a knot of lawsuits, administrative orders, a threat to stop much of Hanford's cleanup work and arguments over which agency has the greater legal clout.

"It really represents a major breakthrough," said Keith Klein, DOE's Hanford manager.

"This allows us to focus on getting the real cleanup work done," said Laura

Cusack, the state ecology department's Tri-Party Agreement administrator.

The state and DOE agreed to let a federal court resolve one major issue — the storage standards for chemical-laced transuranic wastes awaiting shipment to New Mexico.

DOE and the state agreed to speed up resolution of that and hope to have a court decision by next spring. Until then, DOE cannot ship transuranic

See **Dispute**, Page A2

# GN Northern puzzled by DOE's investigation

## ■ Former contractor's records seized by Inspector General

By John Stang  
Herald staff writer

The president of a Yakima-based Hanford subcontractor says he cannot figure out why the Department of Energy's Inspector General's office executed a search warrant on his business.

"They just targeted us. I don't know the reason," said Inram Magsi, president of GN Northern Inc.

DOE Inspector General agents seized documents at GN Northern's headquarters Tuesday.

Jim Shiveley, a U.S. assistant attorney general, confirmed that DOE's Inspector General is investigating GN Northern.

But he and the Inspector General's headquarters in Washington, D.C., declined to elaborate.

Neither Bechtel National, which hired and later fired GN Northern, nor DOE's Office of River Protection, made any complaints to the Inspector General's office, their spokesmen said.

Bechtel and GN Northern, which was hired as part of an effort to help small Mid-Columbia businesses, still are discussing the financial terms of the Yakima company's termination. Magsi said Bechtel "has not paid us a dime yet" on the terminated project. Consequently, he is puzzled why DOE's Inspector General's office seized financial records before his company received any money.

Energy. Fluor workers are removing spent nuclear fuel from the K Basins, converting the site's plutonium into safer forms, cleaning out and decontaminating countless buildings and monitoring and cleaning up contaminated groundwater in central Hanford.

Van Leuven, Fluor Hanford's fifth president since 1996, was promoted to the job in March. He was Fluor Hanford's No. 2 man, its executive vice president, for four years before becoming acting president last February when Keith Thomson retired.

Van Leuven has spent more than 30 years with contractors working with DOE. He has held senior jobs at Department of

Energy sites at Rocky Flats, Colo., and Idaho Falls, Idaho.

Van Leuven moved to Hanford in 1996 when he was president of Waste Management Hanford, one of Fluor Hanford's original permanent subcontractors. During that time, Waste Management posted the highest DOE ratings of any company in Fluor's team.

After a couple of years, he became Fluor Hanford's executive vice president. In that post, he often was a troubleshooter, shepherding difficult projects — such as ensuring that the high-profile K Basins project began removing fuel on time — through crucial times.

This year has been mixed for

classification complex. In 2001, it hired GN Northern for \$1.8 million to test construction materials. Bechtel terminated GN Northern's contract last April, because it was unhappy with the subcontractor's quality assurance program.

In a written statement released late Thursday, GN Northern contended that Bechtel audited and approved GN Northern's quality assurance program before the work began, but then found several problems after GN Northern showed up at the site.

Complying with Hanford's rules and procedures created a bigger administrative burden than GN Northern was led to expect, the company said.

"A number of hidden costs and changes in the project resulted in several points of contention between GN Northern and (Bechtel)," GN Northern's statement said.

The company offered to let Bechtel find another subcontractor to do the work, but Bechtel declined and the two sides renegotiated a new \$2.6 million contact, GN Northern said.

Then GN Northern thought it fixed the quality assurance problems to Bechtel's satisfaction. But Bechtel later voiced more dissatisfaction with the firm's work for reasons "we ... still do not fully understand," GN Northern said.

GN Northern said nine of its employees including the project manager were absorbed by its replacement, which also tried to acquire the Yakima firm's test equipment.

"GN Northern strongly believes that while

Fluor Hanford.

The company is a few months ahead of schedule in converting Hanford's plutonium into safer forms, expecting to finish in early 2004. And Fluor is two months ahead of schedule in moving the K Basins fuel, expecting to finish that job in May 2004.

But Fluor is 10 to 11 months behind on removing radioactive sludge from the K Basins and is under heavy DOE pressure to catch up. Also, DOE is subtracting \$550,000 from Fluor's upcoming fee payment for safety problems at T Plant.

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25 OCT 03

■ *Dave Van Leuven*  
*Fluor Hanford's fifth*  
*president since 1996*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford President Dave Van Leuven may be moving to another job, his employer confirmed Friday.

Local and corporate Fluor Corp. spokesmen cautioned that no definite decision has been made and noted Van Leuven still is president of Hanford's lead contractor.

They declined to elaborate on the possibility of Van Leuven



23026 03

## ■ *GN Northern did soil sampling, testing for Bechtel National*

**By the Herald staff and The Associated Press**

The Department of Energy's Inspector General's office is investigating a former Hanford glassification plant subcontractor.

The reason for the investigation of GN Northern Inc. of Yakima was unknown Wednesday evening.

When contacted Wednesday evening, Erik Olds, spokesman for DOE's Office of River Protection, said he could not be sure whether that agency reported any irregularities about GN Northern to the Inspector General's office, but added he was unaware of any complaints.

GN Northern did soil sampling and testing for Bechtel National as part of the construction of a central Hanford complex to convert underground tanks' radioactive wastes into glass, said John Britton, Bechtel spokesman. The contract was "for less than \$1 million."

GN Northern worked for Bechtel for about 15

months until its contract was terminated because of quality assurance problems, Britton said.

Quality assurance regulations have demanding paperwork requirements, which are sometimes hard for small businesses to meet, he said. "They didn't meet our expectations."

Bechtel awarded the contract to GN Northern as part of an effort to provide Hanford work to local small businesses.

Britton said Bechtel and GN Northern are discussing the details of closing out the contract, including required audits, but no obvious financial disputes had surfaced.

Jim Shively, first assistant U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Washington, told The Associated Press that GN Northern is being investigated and that DOE investigators served a search warrant Tuesday on the company's Yakima office. He declined to provide additional information.

No charges have been filed, Shively said.

Imran Magsi of Selah, president of GN Northern, could not be reached for comment Wednesday evening.

3 NOV 83

# PNNL

# takes aim on spit test

■ *Test could detect harmful exposure quicker than others*

■ Each Monday the Herald takes a look back at a person or issue in the Mid-Columbia's past.

**By Annette Cary**  
Herald staff writer

Scientists in Richland believe a bit of spit could hold the information emergency workers or industrial hygienists need to quickly determine whether someone has been exposed to dangerous levels of pesticides, or even nerve gas.



Tests for exposure to harmful chemicals now often require a blood or urine sample, and laboratory analysis may take days or weeks.

"We're trying to develop approaches to do monitoring for chemicals noninvasively, using a rapid approach on site," said Charles Timchalk, a Battelle toxicologist at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland.

He and his colleagues are continuing work on a portable system that may quickly analyze a few drops of saliva to detect harmful exposures. Instead of sending a sample to a laboratory, a portable instrument could be taken anywhere people might have an exposure — such as a Mid-Columbia orchard where pesticides have been used.

In not much more time than it takes to spit, a worker could learn whether he had been exposed to potentially harmful levels of pesticides.

Most of the initial work by Timchalk and his colleagues has been to develop the system's use for quickly screening children for lead exposure. They envision the device, which costs a few thousand dollars to build, becoming a staple of health fairs to quickly and painlessly screen

See **Spit**, Page A2

# Bechtel planning layoffs

■ *Company says it could lay off 200 by Jan. 31*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

Bechtel National expects to lay off about 200 white-collar workers by Jan. 31.

The Hanford contractor said the proposed layoffs are because of a combination of factors, including that some design and engineering work for the radioactive tank waste glassification complex is done. The cuts also are to adjust to changes in construction of the complex and efficiency efforts.

"We're getting further along on the engineering. The design work is about 60 percent done. Some of it is complete," said Bechtel spokesman John Britton.

Those facing layoffs are workers such as engineers and technical and administrative support staff.

Bechtel is in charge of designing, building and testing the waste glassification complex, which is supposed to be fully operational by 2011.

Right now, the project employs about 2,400 white-collar workers and 1,000 union construction workers.

Bechtel's long-range employment plans project hiring more construction workers in 2004, probably peaking at slightly more than 2,000 in 2006. Meanwhile, administrators, engineers, technicians and support people are expected to hover around 2,000 until 2007, when they will begin a gradual decline.

Efforts will be made to place laid-off employees at other Bechtel and Washington Group International projects, according to a Thursday memo to the employees from Jim Henschel, Bechtel National's waste treatment plant project manager. Washington Group is a permanent Bechtel subcontractor on the project.

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# 4 NOV 03 Credit to help pay for Hanford Reach museum

**By Nathan Isaacs**

Herald staff writer

The Richland Public Facilities District is expected to get a line of credit in the coming weeks to help pay its bills until \$6 million in bonds is sold early next year.

The credit line with Bank of America could be for \$1.5 million to \$2 million. The credit would be given in anticipation of the facilities district's bonds sale, which the bank is handling.

The district is using the money to help build the Hanford Reach National Monument Heritage and Visitor Center, a

combination interpretive center and museum.

The \$34 million center will be on 50 acres in South Columbia Point, which is south of the Interstate 182 bridge and east of the Highway 240 causeway.

The project is split into at least two phases. The \$14 million first phase is expected to be 12,000 to 15,000 square feet and include an open gallery, classroom, gift shop, cafe and administrative space.

Construction is expected to start early December with installation of electric, water and sewer utilities. The district also

expects to hire an architect as well as a contractor to build public access roads in the area.

The \$6 million bond sale is expected to take place in January.

The district plans to pay off those bonds using three sources of money:

■ About \$205,000 annually from 0.033 percent of the state's share of sales taxes collected locally.

■ The district also expects to get about \$34,000 annually from the Benton County Public Facilities District. The county district is giving money to other

projects in the county, including Kennewick's Convention Center.

■ And the facilities district is asking the Richland City Council to give it about \$125,000 annually from lodging taxes.

As for the remaining money, the city is expected to donate 50 acres for the project at a value of about \$4 million. The CREHST museum and Friends of the Hanford Reach are raising \$2 million, which would bring an additional \$1 million already pledged by Battelle Memorial Institute.

Richland also is picking up an addi-

tional \$1 million in costs to install the utilities, restore the natural grasses at Columbia Point and build the access road.

The project would be built through a partnership with the facilities district, city of Richland, CREHST museum, Friends of the Hanford Reach National Monument, Tri-Cities Visitors & Convention Bureau and various tribal partners. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also is expected to be a partner.

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# Fluor Hanford introduces new president

■ *Ron Gallagher replaces Van Leuven as firm's 6th president*

**By John Stang**  
Herald staff writer

Fluor Hanford's sixth president will bring sought-after expertise in commercial practices, but no background in nuclear cleanup, to his new job.

Ron Gallagher, a Fluor Corp. senior vice president for oil and gas production, transportation and refining in North and South



**Gallagher**

Thursday.

Van Leuven will stay with Fluor Corp., but his next post has not been determined yet.

The Department of Energy still has to approve Gallagher's

America, will replace Dave Van Leuven as Fluor Hanford's president in the second week of November, Fluor announced

appointment. However, in a press release, DOE Hanford Manager Keith Klein said he is looking forward to working with Gallagher.

Gallagher is being brought in because of his project management skills and his knowledge of cutting-edge commercial practices, said Ron Hanson, who leads Fluor Corp.'s DOE-related businesses. Hanson also was Fluor Hanford's president from 1998 to 2001.

"We're responding to the vision from (DOE) to have the best business practices in place,"

Hanson said.

He said the change in presidents is a proactive shift to prepare Fluor Hanford for the final three years of its contract. "We don't want to play where the (hockey) puck is, but to play where the puck is going."

Fluor, with about 4,100 employees, is in the last stages of two major projects — removing spent nuclear fuel from the K Basins and converting the site's scrap plutonium into safer forms. Both projects are slightly ahead of schedule and are supposed to finish in 2004. Fluor is

behind schedule on removing radioactive sludge from the K Basins.

Fluor's contract runs until Sept. 30, 2006. Its remaining major projects include tackling the site's massive ground water contamination problems, plus dealing with huge amounts of radioactive and chemical wastes stored in containers in buildings and in burial trenches.

Fluor is also in charge of shutting down the Fast Flux Test Facility and cleaning up the 300

See **Fluor**, Page B7

# DOE to phase out exams for ex-workers

■ *New program to be implemented by Sept. 30*

**By John Stang**

Herald staff writer

PORTLAND — Federally funded medical exams on former Department of Energy workers will be phased out and replaced with a new program by Sept. 30, said a medical researcher involved in the current project.

Hanford Advisory Board member Tim Takaro told other members Thursday in Portland that DOE recently made the change.

Takaro is a doctor, a faculty member in the occupational medicine department at the University of Washington and a key participant in Northwest medical checkups on former DOE plutonium production workers.

DOE has been paying for the exams for nonradiation-related health problems in former workers at its atomic bomb pro-

duction sites across the nation, including Hanford. Separate programs are set up for construction and production employees.

The exams look for health problems related to exposure to beryllium, asbestos, noise and other industrial sources. And DOE is legally required to make sure the exams take place because some workers exposed to beryllium who contracted lung diseases may be eligible for federal compensation.

Takaro and Hank Hartley, outreach coordinator for the Hanford Building Trades Medical Screening Program, said they recently learned from DOE officials that funding problems are leading the federal agency to revise how the checkups are managed.

Takaro is concerned about plans to phase out the current program before DOE has figured out how to replace it since the backlog of people signed up for medical exams is greater than what can be handled by Sept. 30.

DOE officials with the program in

Washington, D.C., could not be reached Thursday afternoon about the plan.

In Hanford's case, former production workers can call toll-free 1-888-277-6886 to schedule checks, which are mostly conducted in the Tri-City area.

Hanford has at least 65 buildings identified as places where workers may have been exposed to beryllium. No current Hanford processes use beryllium, although workers could be exposed to it during cleanup work.

The program has tried to contact more than 70,000 former Hanford production workers, reaching about 30,000.

Almost 2,000 have been checked in the past five years, although momentum is picking up, Takaro said. Doctors have examined about 600 former Hanford production people so far this year.

Another 3,000 have signed up and are waiting for medical checks, but Takaro believes that's too many to be finished in the next 11 months.

In addition, the Hanford Building

Trades Medical Screening Program has checked about 2,400 current and former Hanford construction workers in the past six years, Hartley said in a phone interview.

He said there are about 80,000 living current and former Hanford construction workers eligible for the checks. The program has contacted about 4,600.

So far, that program has identified two cases of chronic beryllium disease and 49 people who are extra sensitive to beryllium, Takaro said.

And 52 percent of the checked 2,400 people show some significant exposure to asbestos and 78 percent have shown some hearing losses, Hartley said.

The construction worker's program has a small waiting list of people wanting medical checks, he said.

"I feel there are a lot more men and women out there who deserve to go through this program," Hartley said.

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