

A Local Perspective of the Hanford Cleanup

Testimony of Pam Larsen, Executive Director, Hanford Communities

DNFSB Meeting – August 26, 2015

I am Pam Larsen, the Executive Director of the Hanford Communities. The Hanford Communities is an Interlocal Organization comprised of the cities and counties that surround the Hanford Site.

First of all I want to express our appreciation for the enormous progress that has been made with cleanup of the Hanford Site and the Department of Energy's commitment to be sure that to be sure the work is done safely. For those of us who live in this region, maintaining the pristine quality of water in the Columbia River is essential. We draw our drinking water from the river, we swim and fish in the river. As we diversify our economy away from Hanford, growing our food processing industry, agriculture, health care and the wine industry we must be assured that our environment is safe and the water quality remains high.

For those reasons it is imperative that the Department of Energy continue to empty tanks and build the extraordinarily complex Waste Treatment Plant. We are very encouraged with the DOE Framework plan for an early start of the Low Activity Vitrification (LAW) facility. We need tank waste treatment as soon as possible. The Direct Feed LAW approach will insure that waste fed to the LAW melters meets specifications. In starting up LAW early, it will also provide additional tank capacity so that waste can continue to be pumped from tanks that are leaking or may leak in the future. This added flexibility is crucial.

We are encouraged that ORP has resumed full Production Engineering of the High Level Waste (HLW) facility and we hear that they may authorize full construction within the next year or so. The Hanford Communities endorse the construction of a blending and conditioning facility to provide the waste feed to the WTP that meets the waste acceptance criteria.

As you are aware, the Department of Energy and the State of Washington are engaged in a dispute about cleanup progress under a federal consent decree. The federal judge has held two hearings about the dispute here in our community. I have attended both and have listened to the attorneys for both sides express their positions. The judge asked a compelling question, "what has changed since you agreed to the conditions in the decree." It is important to note that one of the answers is that the Defense Board has continued to revise what you think is acceptable, manageable risk.

Studies have been undertaken at significant cost that have delayed progress on the project. Tanks have continued to degrade and increase the risk to our region. To my knowledge the studies have largely validated the path forward. In order to avoid further delays we ask you to please get any remaining concerns on the table now so that ORP can complete design work and resume full construction of WTP. We need tank waste treatment as soon as possible.

Because of the litigation with the state DOE attorneys have restricted the information that ORP can share with the public leaving an impression that no progress is being made. The Hanford Communities

have had the unique opportunity to closely observe both ORP and BNI and we can say things have dramatically improved including professionalism, working relationships, mission planning, technical issue resolution and integration between tank farms and WTP. New people have been brought in to leadership positions who are providing strong direction and they are reaching out to workers encouraging them to share ideas and concerns. We believe they are taking the necessary steps to make the WTP plant operational and safe.

I have had the opportunity to tour vitrification plants at Sellafield, La Hague and the Savannah River Site. At each of those facilities they have continued to refine their processes as they have been treating waste. We can do the same, all possible questions that could be asked do not need to be fully answered before the plant begins operation. Any first-of-a-kind facility needs to learn from experience. It is time to start.

I would like to speak briefly about the outstanding progress that has been made in decommissioning and demolition activities at the highly contaminated Plutonium Finishing Plant. DOE expects to meet their milestone and have demolition complete in 2016. This has been a difficult project involving extremely dangerous materials. We are very encouraged by the work that has been done and the focus on safety.

This evening I want to express our appreciation for the highly trained scientists, engineers, technical staff and the remarkable workers that do the hard tasks of cleaning up Hanford. The work they do is difficult, stressful and the materials some of them encounter are very hazardous. We honor them and sincerely appreciate their efforts which are improving our environment, remediating risk and putting us in a position to move forward with a new vision for clean energy generation, new jobs and a future no longer tied to the legacy of Hanford.

We are encouraged by continuous improvements in the safety culture and the increased confidence of the workforce that they can raise questions and concerns about the work they are doing. My impression from our friends and neighbors who work at WTP is that the culture is healthy.

There are a number of organizations that seem to love negative press coverage about Hanford. We have found this frustrating and distracting from the important issues that need to be discussed. There is much more cleanup work to be accomplished. We look forward to continued public dialog about the work remaining, not just the issues that generate headlines designed to sell papers, garner donations and scare the heck out of the public.

For us who live here in this beautiful region, and the extraordinary workforce who are engaged in cleanup activities, we would like to point to work that is getting done and progress being made on the technical decisions that must be made. The cleanup of the Hanford Site is investment worthy, it will benefit the entire Pacific Northwest both environmentally and economically. We share with you the common goal of safely treating the waste. The risk of not doing so is real. The concept of zero risk in treating the waste must be balanced with a timely, cost effective and aggressive approach to get the cleanup done!

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspectives.

Our Purpose

- Coordinate local government involvement in Department of Energy decision making on issues affecting the Hanford Communities.
- Increase public awareness and involvement in Hanford cleanup issues.
- Provide technical and analytical resources to review, evaluate and monitor conditions and policies at Hanford.
- Evaluate reports and findings, issue position papers, prepare letters and testimony, and sponsor activities to inform local citizens about Hanford related environmental health, safety and socio-economic issues.
- Interact with the Department of Energy, the Washington State Department of Ecology, the EPA and others regarding Hanford environmental contamination, remediation, waste management, emergency response, and work force and site transition issues.

Our Members

City of Richland
City of Kennewick
City of Pasco
Port of Benton
Benton County
Franklin County

Governing Board

Bob Thompson, Chairman, Richland City Council
Steve Young, Mayor of Kennewick
Mike Garrison, Pasco City Council
Bob Larson, Commissioner, Port of Benton
Rick Miller, Commissioner, Franklin County
James Beaver, Commissioner, Benton County

Administrative Board

Cindy Johnson, Chair, Richland City Manager
Dave Zabell, Pasco City Manager
Marie Mosley, Kennewick City Manager
Adam Fyall, Benton County
Rick Miller, Commissioner, Franklin County
Diahann Howard, Port of Benton

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Hanford Communities



City of Richland

City of Kennewick

City of Pasco

Port of Benton

Benton County

Franklin County

*Independent Communities
With Common Interests*

www.ci.richland.wa.us/richland/hanford

Hanford Communities

The U.S. Department of Energy's Hanford Reservation dominates this region in terms of its size, employment and expenditures. As Hanford's mission evolves from defense to waste management and environmental restoration, massive restructuring of programs and the work force is taking place.

Cleanup progress over the next 20-30 years will shrink Hanford's physical area and level of employment. The rigors of this transition underscore the need for an organization to coordinate the efforts of local governments impacted by Hanford. The Hanford Communities serves this need by bringing local governments together to take the future of their communities into their own hands.

Formed in early 1994, the Hanford Communities is an intergovernmental cooperative organization of Benton County and four cities that are home to nearly 100 percent of Hanford's work force. By joining forces, independent Hanford communities members can concentrate their efforts and provide unified advice and support to the Department of Energy on important transition issues.

To move from a position of economic dependence to independence and partnership with federal agencies, the Hanford Communities focuses its energy in these areas:

Hanford Policy Guidance

Every year, dozens of policy issues are studied by the Department of Energy. The Hanford communities monitor the status of major policy issues and supplied in-depth analysis and information to local governments. The Hanford Communities Newsletter keeps local government representatives informed and involved in Hanford policy formulation. Common policy positions are formally communicated to federal officials and other stakeholders.

Public Education and Involvement Programs

The Hanford Communities helps elected representatives increase the awareness of Hanford-related issues among their constituents. The Hanford Communities sponsors activities to coordinate public review of policy issues critical to the Hanford area.

Environmental Monitoring

Safeguarding the environment and protecting worker and public safety are matters of utmost concern to Hanford area governments. Hanford Communities members are kept informed of the latest Hanford health and safety issues. Shared concerns are discussed and common positions are communicated to the Department of Energy.

Speakers' Bureau

The 2009-2010 Hanford Communities Speakers' Bureau presenters are knowledgeable in their field and directly involved in the Hanford cleanup. Topics available for presentation to local organizations range from characterization and remediation of soils and groundwater to budget issues including plans for spending ARRA (Stimulus) funds. Other topics include the Tri-Party Agreement, waste retrieval & disposition, tank waste retrieval and progress on the Waste Treatment Plant to vitrify of tank waste.

Community Outreach

The Hanford Communities community outreach efforts range from education and industry partnerships to community event participation. Outreach efforts include opportunities for local students to "shadow" with Department of Ecology personnel and Hanford Communities representatives.

Issue Briefings

The Hanford Communities produce "Issue Briefings" that are broadcast locally on Charter cablevision and on public access cable in the Seattle and Portland markets. The Issue Briefings provide a vehicle for local stakeholders to discuss important Hanford issues with those directly involved in the Hanford cleanup.

■ *Richland* ■ *Kennewick* ■ *Pasco* ■ *West Richland* ■ *Port of Benton* ■ *Benton County*