PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Tom Carpenter, Exec. Dir.
(206) 419-5829

HANFORD CHALLENGE JOINS WITH OTHER NATIONAL AND REGIONAL NON-PROFITS TO SUBMIT COMMENTS CALLING ON DOE TO WITHDRAW ITS PROPOSAL TO RE-LABEL AND ABANDON HIGH-LEVEL RADIOACTIVE WASTE

The practical, real-world harm of DOE’s proposal would allow the Trump Administration DOE—and future administrations—to abandon extraordinary amounts of the world’s most toxic waste at nuclear weapons cleanup sites across the country.

Today Hanford Challenge joined with six other national and regional non-profit organizations to submit formal comments opposing a Department of Energy proposal to relabel and abandon high-level nuclear waste in shallow land burial at sites like Hanford.

Hanford Challenge (WA), the Natural Resources Defense Council (DC), Columbia Riverkeeper (OR), Southwest Research & Information Center (NM), Snake River Alliance (ID), Savannah River Site Watch (SC), Institute for Policy Studies (DC), and Nuclear Information & Resource Service (DC) jointly submitted comments on the Department of Energy’s Request for Public Comment on the U.S. Department of Energy Interpretation of High-Level Radioactive Waste. 83 Fed. Reg. 50909, October 10, 2018.

The formal comments warn that DOE’s proposal to “reinterpret” the Nuclear Waste Policy Act would “be contrary to law and create a host of technically unsound, indefensible, and dangerous situations in multiple locations around the country. Bluntly, finalizing this internal order would flatly violate the express directions of Congress found in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (“NWPA”).”

Hanford currently has 56 million gallons of high-level waste in tanks, and more that has leaked under the tanks and has been dumped in the ground. It is important that this waste is removed, treated, and sent somewhere deep underground to isolate it from humans and the environment for the many hundreds of thousands of years it takes for some of its radioactive constituents to decay. It should not be left at sites like Hanford.

“After almost 30 years of a program to clean up dangerous defense waste at the Hanford nuclear site in southeastern Washington, the Department of Energy now wants to change the rules to make the job easier and save money. If approved, the proposal poses new dangers to the health
and safety of people and the environment—not just in southeastern Washington, but at nuclear sites around the country,” said Tom Carpenter, Executive Director of Hanford Challenge.

The comments submitted today warn that “DOE proposes to fundamentally alter more than 50 years of national consensus on how the most toxic, radioactive, and dangerous waste in the world is managed and ultimately disposed in geologic repositories. The proposal, if implemented, would seriously endanger millions of Americans and countless future generations. Because HLW contains highly radioactive fission products and radionuclides that pose long-term dangers to human health and the environment, Congress has enacted laws defining HLW and defined DOE responsibilities to safely manage the waste at its sites and to dispose of that waste in geologic repositories.”

The organizations called upon DOE to withdraw this HLW Reinterpretation Proposal and commence working with the immediately affected States, Tribes, Congress, and interested members of the public on reforms to nuclear waste law. The groups also urged that the DOE put the cleanup of the nuclear weapons complex on a course that is both scientifically defensible and publicly accepted.

Washington State Governor Jay Inslee and Attorney General Bob Ferguson also submitted comments to the DOE opposing DOE’s attempt to shortcut the cleanup, as did the State of Oregon and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.

Click here to read the joint comments.