



PRESS RELEASE

New Report Charges Federal Government with Exporting Unacceptable Nuclear Risks to Communities near Hanford Nuclear Site

Immediate Release
November 25, 2020

Contact: Tom Carpenter, 206-419-5829
Bob Alvarez, 301-585-7672

Seattle, WA: An extensively-documented new report released today advocates that nuclear wastes at the Hanford Nuclear Site should be treated onsite. The practice of treating Hanford's low-level and plutonium-containing wastes at Perma-Fix Northwest, a commercial facility in Richland, WA, should end.

The report, prepared by Robert Alvarez and Hanford Challenge, is entitled *Risky Business at Perma-Fix Northwest*.

"The US Energy Department should stop sending nuclear waste for treatment and processing at Perma-Fix Northwest because doing so poses unacceptable risks of exposures from potential releases in a growing nearby residential community," said Tom Carpenter, Executive Director of Hanford Challenge.

Perma-Fix Northwest is a commercial Low-Level Waste (LLW) and Mixed Low-Level Radioactive Waste (MLLW) treatment and storage facility located on 35 acres in an urban area in the City of Richland and near the Department of Energy's (DOE) Hanford Nuclear Site.

Perma-Fix Northwest is currently incinerating, compacting, and transporting millions of cubic feet of radiochemical and mixed waste (waste that is both hazardous and radioactive) per year; much of that waste is coming from the Hanford Nuclear Site.

Robert Alvarez, former Senior Advisor to three Energy Secretaries during the Clinton Administration, was an author of the report. He stated, "In making fuel for the world's most dangerous weapons, Hanford generated some of the world's most dangerous wastes. Over the past several years, the quantity of these wastes sent by DOE to Perma-Fix have dramatically increased for processing in an urban area. Now DOE and Perma-Fix Northwest are seeking to increase even larger, more dangerous quantities - raising risks to workers and the public as the population grows nearby."

Continued offsite shipping, storage and treatment of plutonium-containing nuclear wastes from Hanford to surrounding residential communities creates avoidable health, safety, and security

risks. According to the EPA, in 2010 over 32,000 people lived within 5 miles of Perma-Fix Northwest. The area has continued to rapidly grow around Perma-Fix over the past decade.

Richland residents are at risk from the radioactive and hazardous materials transported over public roads between Hanford and Perma-Fix. According to State of Washington and federal regulators, Perma-Fix Northwest in Richland exceeded onsite soil contamination limits, improperly stored radioactive and other hazardous wastes, handled wastes resulting in leakage of plutonium and significant workplace contamination, failed to notify regulators of known violations, and exposed several employees to radiation. Perma-Fix Northwest was also fined a total of \$551,891 from 2008 to 2019 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Washington Department of Ecology for hazardous waste violations.

Hanford Challenge's investigation uncovered a disturbing history of accidents, violations, findings, and non-compliances that raise serious questions about whether Perma-Fix should be allowed to continue treating dangerous Hanford waste. Cost-savings is only one aspect to consider when deciding where and how to clean up Hanford's dangerous waste, but cost savings should never be the sole consideration.

Hanford Challenge recommends that the Department of Energy revitalize its internal capacity at Hanford to perform the waste treatment functions that it is currently sending to Perma-Fix Northwest. The report argues that Hanford is a more suitable location for treatment due to a higher level of transparency and accountability, remote location further away from populated areas, further from the groundwater, ability to avoid the risky practice of transporting thousands of cubic meters of dangerous waste on public roadways, and a workforce that is highly trained, qualified, and certified.

Hanford Challenge recommends that DOE, EPA and the State of Washington:

- 1. Increase Safety by Bringing This Work Onsite**
- 2. Abandon Proposals for Perma-Fix Northwest to Treat Hanford's Tank Waste**
- 3. Increase Regulatory Oversight and Coordination**
- 4. Evaluate Perma-Fix Northwest Emissions for Air Operating Permit**
- 5. Posting of Regulatory Information on Hanford's Administrative Record**
- 6. Enable WA State Department of Health to Impose Fines and Penalties for Violations of Atomic Energy Act Licensing Requirements**
- 7. Increase Department of Energy Oversight of Perma-Fix Northwest**

[The report and associated materials can be accessed here.](#)