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To: "andrewt@dnfsb.gov" <andrewt@dnfsb.gov>
Date: 7/12/2011 6:44 PM
Subject: Oregon Hanford Cleanup Board Comment on DNFSB Recommendation 2011-1.
Attachments: OHCB-to_DNFSB_Letter.pdf

Attached are comments on DNFSB Recommendation 2011-1, on behalf of the Oregon Hanford Cleanup Board.

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OREGON HANFORD CLEANUP BOARD

Max Power, Chair

July 12, 2011

Mecal Samkow, Vice-Chair

Pat Hart

Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
625 Indian Avenue, NW, Suite 700
Washington D.C. 20004-2901

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To whom it may concern:

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Sen. David Nelson

Rep. Jules Bailey

Rep. Vicki Berger

Rep. John Huffman

*Shelley Carlson
Administrator*

The Oregon Hanford Cleanup Board (Cleanup Board) is deeply troubled by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) determination that the “prevailing safety culture at (Hanford’s) Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant (WTP) is flawed and effectively defeats” a Secretarial mandate to establish and maintain a strong safety culture at the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) nuclear facilities. We are even more concerned that the DNFSB believes “the flawed safety culture...has a substantial probability of jeopardizing” the success of the tank waste treatment mission.

The Oregon Hanford Cleanup Board was created by the Oregon legislature to provide guidance on issues involving the Hanford nuclear site that affect Oregonians. The Board includes state agency representatives, legislators, a Tribal representative, and public members with a range of expertise and interests that include nuclear engineering and physical and environmental sciences.

The Cleanup Board discussed DNFSB Recommendation 2011-1 during our meeting on June 23-24, 2011. That discussion led to a desire by the Cleanup Board to formally express its deep concerns about this issue.

We do not have the ability to judge on our own whether serious problems do exist related to resolution of open WTP design technical issues, and with the safety culture at the WTP. However, the detailed investigation by the DNFSB and its resultant findings, combined with the persistence of these issues for some time now without satisfactory resolution, causes us great concern.

For more than 20 years, safely and effectively dealing with Hanford’s tank wastes has been at the top of the Cleanup Board’s Hanford priorities. We, along with the Hanford regulators and many Hanford stakeholders, have seen past efforts to construct vitrification facilities fail, with corresponding delays in the start (and projected completion) of tank waste treatment. With the huge financial investment already made in the WTP complex, and the continuing degradation of the waste tanks as they age and become less sound, we cannot risk the WTP facilities not working as designed. The safe and timely operation of these facilities is absolutely essential to the cleanup of Hanford’s

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tank wastes and long-term protection of the Columbia River. Issues related to safety and open technical dissent and issue resolution are vital to building this facility safely and having it operate as intended.

We are pleased that Secretary Chu acknowledges and accepts the DNFSB recommendations, though he disagrees with some of the findings. What still concerns us is that it appears DOE believes the safety culture is adequate (though it agrees there is room for improvement), while the DNFSB believes it has failed. Again, we cannot judge the merits of either position – but are concerned that this differing view exists.

Secretary Chu's assurances are not likely, in themselves, to restore credibility among all the interested parties necessary to timely and successfully launch the waste treatment mission. What is needed now is an open, transparent and credibly independent process that addresses both the overall safety culture and specific technical questions about impediments to safe operation of the WTP.

On behalf of the Oregon Hanford Cleanup Board, thank you for your attention to this very serious matter.

Sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The signature on the left is 'Max Power' and the signature on the right is 'Mecal S.'.

Max Power, Chair

Mecal Samkow, Vice Chair