



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor



August 1, 2025

U.S. Department Energy

Attn: Dana Cowley

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Ms. Cowley,

Oregon appreciates the opportunity to provide comment on this dangerous waste site adjacent to the Columbia River. The 324 Building has been a high-profile and high-risk remediation project for more than a decade. As near-term action is conducted, we support the “decoupled option,” as it allows a more complete characterization prior to exposing the contaminated soils.

However, we urge DOE to use caution. We hold protection of the Columbia River paramount. Sufficient groundwater characterization and a monitoring network adequate to identify mobilized contamination quickly is critical. Similarly, a plan to address those contaminants once they are detected is necessary to prevent migration to the river. DOE should evaluate passive monitoring tools, as well as installing monitor wells which can be dual-used as extraction wells to contain contamination mobilized by the eventual excavation.

As long as there is no moisture intrusion and DOE is certain that the contaminants are not mobile, this is one instance where slowing down might be a viable solution. Following building demolition and thorough characterization of the degree and extent of the contamination, we suggest that DOE may want to take a step back and re-evaluate the remedial strategy. While a single half-life may not seem to make a difference in such highly contaminated soils, it might reduce the necessary depth and breadth of excavation required to meet the remedial goals. Again, this is only a strategy to consider if there is certainty that the contamination is constrained to soil. Assuming there is truly no threat to groundwater, the longer it takes to remediate the site, the lower the risk to the workforce and the environment should contaminants be mobilized during cleanup.

We note that neither the Atomic Energy Act nor the Nuclear Waste Policy Act are listed as applicable or relevant and appropriate requirements. As high-level waste is prohibited from disposal in the on-site CERCLA landfill, it seems that the NWPA in particular should be considered as an ARAR. Given the broad potential for interpretation of the definition of high-level waste, we recommend that DOE conduct a Waste Incidental to Reprocessing evaluation prior to disposal, even though they take the position that one is not required. The evaluation seems straightforward, since the contaminants are the key radionuclides which must be removed to the extent practicable. It is intrinsically the case that a key radionuclide cannot be removed from itself, and therefore the material would likely pass a WIR. “Checking the box” documents DOE’s willingness to be transparent, and will minimize liability associated with any potential litigation.

The contamination under the 324 Building remains one of the most complex and dangerous remedial challenges at the site outside of the Central Plateau. Challenging conditions are present aboveground in the robust and contaminated building materials as well as the sands and boulders comprising the subsurface geologic materials. We trust that DOE will ensure that protection of the workforce is a priority as they enact a complex cleanup to protect human health and the environment in uncertain conditions. If you have any questions about these comments, please reach out to me tom.sicilia@energy.oregon.gov or my assistant director Max Woods maxwell.woods@energy.oregon.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Sicilia', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Sicilia, RG
Hanford Hydrogeologist
Oregon Department of Energy

cc:

Laura Buelow, US Environmental Protection Agency
Stephanie Schleif, Washington Department of Ecology
Mason Murphy, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
Anthony Smith, Nez Perce Tribe
Laurene Contreras, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
Oregon Hanford Cleanup Board
Susan Coleman, Hanford Advisory Board