



Changes to the Tri-Party Agreement Milestones will Delay Removal and Disposal of Long-Lived, Dangerous Waste at the Hanford Nuclear Site

**Public Comment
Deadline:**

June 23, 2021

The Problem.

When plutonium production ended at the Hanford Nuclear Site in 1989, the U.S. Dept. of Energy (Energy), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Washington Dept. of Ecology (Ecology) (referred to collectively as the TPA Agencies) signed the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA), a legally binding comprehensive cleanup and compliance agreement. Now, after almost 30 years cleanup and many delays, multiple TPA milestones are unattainable with the current work schedule, putting Hanford cleanup in serious jeopardy.

The Proposal.

Through negotiations, the TPA Agencies propose several changes to TPA Milestone M-091, concerning long-lived dangerous waste stored in Hanford's Central Plateau. The result? Delayed removal, treatment, and disposal of radioactive hazardous waste and an increased threat to the environment and people.

Type of Wastes Affected.

M-091 deals with managing and disposing of Hanford's transuranic mixed waste (TRUM) and Hanford's mixed low-level waste (MLLW).

TRANSURANIC MIXED WASTE (TRUM)

TRUM is Transuranic (TRU) waste that contains a hazardous, chemical component subject to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) or Washington State Dangerous Waste Regulations. Generally, TRU wastes are contaminated with radioactive elements heavier than uranium on the periodic chart (i.e., plutonium, americium, curium, or neptunium). TRU wastes contain more than 100 nanocuries of alpha-emitting transuranic isotopes, with half-lives greater than 20 years. This type of waste mostly contains plutonium-239, which means it remains hazardous for hundreds of thousands of years.

MIXED LOW-LEVEL WASTE (MLLW)

Radioactive waste that contains a hazardous, chemical component and is disposed of on site at Hanford.

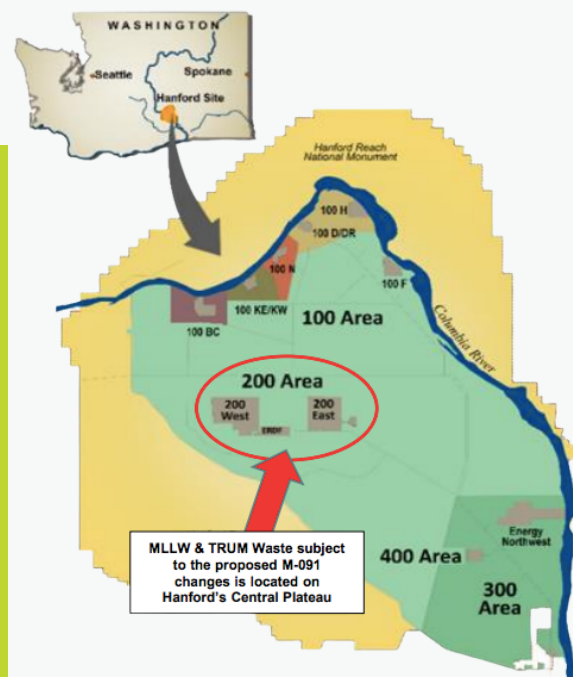


photo courtesy of U.S. Dept. of Energy



Legally, TRU waste must be shipped to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico for disposal in a deep geological repository.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Dept. of Energy.

How is Waste Stored?

Underground trenches in Hanford's Low-Level Burial Grounds contain 17,5000 containers of buried waste. Currently it is unclear if this waste is MLLW or TRUM. According to Energy, 11,000 containers of waste are stored above ground in large indoor buildings and smaller sheds, and outdoors in the Solid Waste Operations Complex. Many of these containers have a history of mislabeling and corroding, with others still in need of proper waste characterization to ensure proper disposal.

What are some of the Issues with the New Milestones?

- Energy is significantly delaying deadlines for shipping dangerous TRUM waste offsite to WIPP, pushing this out until 2050.
- The new milestones fail to differentiate the amounts of TRUM versus MLLW in the containers.
- Many of the milestone deadlines rely on a commitment to begin shipping TRUM waste to WIPP by 2028, if these shipments do not resume, Energy's delayed deadline of 2050 to remove TRUM waste off site will fail.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has considered allowing the disposal of TRUM waste in low-level waste disposal facilities. This could make on-site disposal of TRUM an option if Energy never sends the waste to WIPP. CRK is concerned that hazardous waste could dribble into the environment over time, and may pose a serious threat to people and the Columbia River. Land disposal of TRUM should never be the long-term goal.



TAKE ACTION:
Public Comment
Deadline:
June 23, 2021

Online:
bit.ly/hanford-2021

By Mail:
Attn: Jennifer Colborn, HMIS
P.O. Box 450, H6-60
Richland, WA 99352

Columbia Riverkeeper's mission is to protect and restore the water quality of the Columbia River and all life connected to it, from the headwaters to the Pacific Ocean.

Clean Water
Healthy Rivers
Our Future

How can I Hold the Government Accountable?

Tell the TPA Agencies that kicking deadlines further down the road takes the pressure off the TPA Agencies to deal with the TRUM waste problem. It sets up Hanford cleanup to pose a greater risk, for longer, to the people who depend on the Columbia River and who hope to use the site in the future.

photo courtesy of Kiliyi Yuyan (2019)



This product is funded through a Public Participation Grant from the Department of Ecology. The content was reviewed for grant consistency but is not necessarily endorsed by the agency.