



Fact Sheet

**HISTORY OF NUCLEAR SAFETY ISSUES AT THE
HANFORD WASTE TREATMENT PLANT**

Senator Claire McCaskill

Chairman, Subcommittee on Financial & Contracting Oversight

The Waste Treatment Plant (WTP) is a federal nuclear facility in Hanford, Washington, that is intended to convert hazardous, highly radioactive nuclear waste into a more stable and safe form for permanent disposal.¹ Below are excerpts from reports by multiple government agencies raising concerns about the failure by the Department of Energy and the contractor, Bechtel, to adequately incorporate nuclear safety in the project's design and construction.

September 2013 – U.S. Department of Energy Office of Inspector General, *Department of Energy Quality Assurance: Design Control for the Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant at the Hanford Site (DOE/IG-0894)*

- “Bechtel discovered that more than a third of the changes made to supplier design documents had not received the required Nuclear Safety review and approval, and, that the problems were systemic”
- “According to Bechtel officials, procedures governing Nuclear Safety review provided ‘opportunities for interpretation’.”

December 2012 – Government Accountability Office, *Hanford Waste Treatment Plant: DOE Needs to Take Action to Resolve Technical and Management Challenges (GAO-13-38)*

- “Using the fast-track, design-build approach, DOE has moved the project forward constructing and fabricating WTP components that may not work and may not meet nuclear safety standards.”
- “DOE’s WTP project at Hanford has not been a well-planned, well-managed, or well-executed major capital construction project.”

December 19, 2012 – Department of Energy, Office of River Protection, Gary Brunson, Director WTP Engineering Division, Memorandum to Dr. Stephen Chu, Secretary of Department of Energy

- “This memorandum recommends, based upon a compelling body of objective evidence demonstrating Indeterminate Quality throughout the WTP facilities, that all activities affecting engineering design, nuclear safety, and construction and installation of all Structures, Systems and Components be stopped to avoid further nuclear safety compromises and substantial rework within WTP.”

April 2012 – Department of Energy, Office of Inspector General, *The Department of Energy’s \$12.2 Billion Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant – Quality Assurance Issues – Black Cell Vessels (DOE/IG-0863)*

- “Premature failure of these components could potentially impact safety, contaminate large portions of a multi-billion dollar facility and interrupt waste processing for an unknown period of time.”

March 22, 2012 – Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, *Public Meeting and Hearing*

- “The Board’s investigation concluded that the Waste Treatment Plan project suffered from serious problems in safety culture and in the management of safety issues”

January 2012 – Department of Energy, Office of Health, Safety and Security, *Independent Oversight Assessment of Nuclear Safety Culture and Management of Nuclear Safety Concerns at the Hanford Site Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant*

- “...[T]here is a definite unwillingness and uncertainty among employees about the ability to openly challenge management decisions. There are definite perceptions that there is not an environment conducive to raising concerns or where management wants or willingly listens to concerns.”
- “Fear of retaliation was identified in some groups as inhibiting the identification of problems.”

October 7-8, 2012 – Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board Public Meeting and Hearing, *Hanford Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant (WTP)*

- “There are several areas of the Waste Treatment Plant design in which the Board has concerns with the safety, and its ultimate operation for the decades the plant must operate.”

October 2010 – Department of Energy, Office of Health, Safety and Security, *Independent Review of Nuclear Safety Culture at the Hanford Site Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant Project*

- “...there are pockets of individuals within the WTP who believe that [Bechtel] management has created a ‘chilled’ atmosphere (an environment where individuals are discouraged from raising questions or safety concerns and may fear retaliation for raising safety issues).”
- “...management action (e.g., schedule pressures) have not consistently supported the message that safety is not to be compromised to meet schedules and cost objectives.”

April 6, 2006 – Government Accountability Office, *Testimony Before the House Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations (GAO-06-602T)*

- “Importantly, Bechtel failed on several occasions to ensure that nuclear safety requirements were being met, including allowing design changes to be made without following nuclear safety procedures and failing to detect serious construction flaws in tanks that will hold radioactive material in the facilities.”

¹ U.S. Department of Energy, Hanford Website (online at www.hanford.gov) (accessed March 6, 2014).