

# INTRODUCTION

---

## WHAT IS HANFORD?

Hanford is a 586-square mile site in southeastern Washington State that was created in 1943 as part of the Manhattan Project to produce plutonium for nuclear weapons. A total of nine nuclear reactors were eventually built along the banks of the Columbia River as the defense mission continued throughout the Cold War years. The weapons material production mission ended in the late 1980s and the Site's mission shifted from production to waste cleanup. However, more than 40 years of plutonium production created an enormous challenge in terms of hundreds of square miles of contaminated soil and groundwater and millions of gallons of highly radioactive waste stored in underground tanks.

## WHO'S WHO AT HANFORD?

The U.S. Department of Energy (USDOE) Richland Operations Office and the Office of River Protection manage and operate the Hanford Site. The Richland Operations Office oversees management of the Hanford Site, including restoration of the Columbia River corridor and transition of the central part of the Hanford Site for waste treatment and long-term storage. Richland Operations Office is responsible for moving 1,200 metric tons of spent fuel away from the River Corridor; stabilizing 4 tons of plutonium; restoring land; placing reactors in safe storage; demolishing old facilities along the Columbia River; providing site infrastructure; remediating groundwater; and doing a host of other cleanup activities. The Office of River Protection was created in 1998 by the U.S. Congress to manage the USDOE's largest, most complex environmental cleanup project – Hanford's tank waste retrieval, treatment, and disposal project. The Office of River Protection's mission is to retrieve and treat tank waste, and close the tank farms to protect the Columbia River.

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulate USDOE's activities. The regulatory agencies divide authority for different aspects of Hanford Site cleanup. Ecology's Nuclear Waste Program is responsible for oversight of the tank waste treatment and storage, waste management activities and implementation of the state's cleanup regulations. EPA has lead oversight for the *Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980* cleanup activities that include removal and transfer of spent nuclear fuel from corroding storage pools to safer storage areas. These two regulatory agencies oversee other multiple cleanup activities as well.

## WHAT IS THE TRI-PARTY AGREEMENT?

The *Hanford Federal Facility Agreement and Consent Order* (Tri-Party Agreement) was signed in 1989 by USDOE, EPA, and Ecology. The original Tri-Party Agreement outlined a 30-year cleanup schedule to bring the Hanford Site into compliance with state and federal environmental laws. The Tri-Party Agreement is a legal agreement made up of action plans that include milestones, or deadlines, for specific cleanup actions to be completed. Additionally, each major milestone series consists of interim milestones guiding cleanup activities through the course of the project.

The Tri-Party Agreement also outlines the process for changing, removing or adding milestones; the conditions under which penalties may be issued; and the requirements for public participation activities pertaining to Hanford cleanup actions. Changes can be made to the Tri-Party Agreement with the approval of all three agencies. The change request process can be initiated by any of the Tri-Parties, and a public participation process must be followed prior to any changes being implemented.

## Introduction

---

### **WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS PLAN?**

This Community Relations Plan outlines the public participation processes implemented by the Tri-Parties under authority of the Tri-Party Agreement, and identifies several ways the public can participate in the Hanford Site cleanup decision-making process.

In many cases, Hanford public involvement goes beyond what is required by law because the Tri-Parties believe public involvement is essential to cleanup success. The Tri-Parties conduct public involvement and information activities both cooperatively and independently.

This Community Relations Plan intends to fulfill applicable state and federal laws regarding development of community involvement and public participation plans. The plan also serves as one of the overall public participation plans guiding public involvement at the Hanford Site. Additional project-specific, public participation plans will be developed as needed.

The Tri-Parties recognize that people nationwide are concerned and affected by the Hanford Site. Some primary reasons for public involvement include the following:

- When members of the public are involved in the decision-making process at the Hanford Site, they help ensure that better long-term decisions are made.
- Better decisions are made if the public is involved early, frequently, and regularly.
- Continued public support in the cleanup process will help maintain political support for cleanup funding.
- If the public is not informed or involved in the decision-making process, it has reason to doubt, criticize, or stop the cleanup process.

This is the fourth revision to the Community Relations Plan. (The plan was originally issued in 1990.) The primary changes in the 2001-revised Community Relations Plan include updated information, a better explanation of Hanford Site public participation plans, and a new format for improved readability.

### **WHY SHOULD THE PUBLIC GET INVOLVED?**

Cleanup at Hanford is one of the largest environmental challenges, as well as one of the most expensive. Public support for cleanup activities plays a vital role in ensuring that the Hanford Site receives adequate funding to continue cleanup progress. Public participation in the decision-making process results in better decision-making and more sustainable decisions.