

## Federal Court Order May Impact Cleanup Work at Hanford

RICHLAND, Wash., February 12, 1996 -- In compliance with an order issued on Thursday, February 8, 1996, by a Discovery Master for the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Washington, the U. S. Department of Energy and its contractors at Hanford began work this weekend on a massive document search which will involve nearly every employee at the site to some degree over the next several days.

The Discovery Master issued the order as part of a class-action lawsuit filed about five years ago by several groups and individuals known collectively as "Hanford Downwinders." The suit was brought against several past DOE contractors and is related to possible health effects of past Hanford operations.

The order elaborates upon an earlier ruling by the court in response to a motion by the plaintiffs for discovery information. The Discovery Master's order requires DOE, as custodian of the information, to complete the following tasks by Friday, February 16, 1996:

1. Provide to the plaintiffs a list of information repositories at Hanford, the nature of information at those locations, and any finding aids (methods of locating) the identified information.
  - o The Richland Operations Office determined to take two actions to ensure full compliance with this requirement:
  - o Perform a room-by-room, building-by-building, area-by-area search of every facility at Hanford to determine where information is located.
  - o Require all employees at Hanford to complete a survey to identify relevant information for which they are responsible. (A copy of the survey and accompanying instructions are attached.)
2. The order also requires DOE to identify and index documents and information relating to all airborne and potentially airborne emissions, including entrainment or other evolutions, such as centrifuging, sparging, or any other processes, chemical or mechanical, which could influence entrainment or particulate and gaseous releases. The department must provide an index for that information to the plaintiff by Friday, February 16, 1996.

In addition, the order requires similar information from all DOE sites nationwide by February 16, 1996.

Late on Friday, February 9, 1996, John Wagoner, Manager of DOE Richland Operations Office, directed all site employees to make response to the court's order their highest priority, second only to safety. A questionnaire was sent to all site employees over the weekend, requiring them to begin the process of identifying and locating the information needed to respond.

The order includes the following types of information: studies, reports, analyses of data, drafts, drawings, photographs, sketches, correspondence, and personal notes and memoranda. The order applies to all information: formal and informal, official and unofficial, published and unpublished, in both written and electronic form.

Compliance may temporarily affect some cleanup work at Hanford. "To respond to the court's order will require a huge effort, but we will not in any way compromise safety," said Wagoner. "We don't yet know the total magnitude of the effort, or what the costs will be, but we're obligated to comply with the Judge's order by the deadline. Funding for this effort will have to come out of the current Hanford clean up budget. We also don't know what the long term impact will be on site cleanup activities," he said.

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