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# DOE NEWS

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **DOE Directs Strengthening of Beryllium Protection Program Expert Review Finds No Compromise of Health and Safety**

A team of experts looking into allegations of beryllium exposure at two Hanford buildings has found no imminent safety hazard and no evidence of worker exposure above safety limits, though the team also found areas where contractor Fluor Hanford's compliance with the federally-mandated Chronic Beryllium Disease Prevention Program could be strengthened.

Beryllium is a naturally occurring metal used in metal working, electronics, laboratory work, and other industries. The material was used at Hanford from the 1950s to 1986. Beryllium disease can occur when people inhale beryllium dust or fumes, and primarily affects the lungs.

In a March 1, 2004 letter and press conference, public interest group Heart of America Northwest alleged that Fluor Hanford workers in buildings 272W and 328 were in danger due to their potential exposure to beryllium. The group also alleged that a planned transfer of fabrication equipment (primarily from building 272W) to an offsite private contractor endangered the public.

The Department of Energy's Richland Operations Office (RL) took a number of steps following the allegations:

- An RL industrial hygienist and RL facility safety representative, supported by three Fluor bargaining unit (HAMTC) safety representatives, were sent immediately to the areas of concern to evaluate the situation. The team inspected conditions and met with facility management, technical staff, and workers. They determined, and facility workers agreed, that safety was not threatened and that an imminent danger did not exist.
- RL issued direction to Fluor requiring the approval of the RL Manager prior to release of any potentially beryllium-contaminated equipment/items to the general public. The

fabrication equipment has not yet been transferred; DOE has directed Fluor to provide more information on the precautions that will be taken prior to releasing the equipment.

- RL assembled a team of experts to conduct a full and thorough investigation into the allegations. The team consisted of Robert Bistline, Ph.D, from the DOE Rocky Flats Field Office (which has dealt successfully with beryllium issues); David Weitzman, a Certified Industrial Hygienist (CIH) who had significant involvement in developing the requirements for the federal Chronic Beryllium Disease Prevention Program and who is from the Office of Environment, Safety and Health at DOE Headquarters in Washington, D.C.; John Martyny, Ph.D, CIH of National Jewish Medical and Research Center (a recognized leader in the field); Joe Eizaguirre, DOE-RL CIH; and Roger Briggs, CIH from the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory Site Office. A HAMTC safety representative observed the team activities.

Following interviews, inspections, and review of procedures and documents, the team of experts rejected both of the group's primary allegations.

Fluor policy dictates that employees who have beryllium disease or are sensitized to beryllium are not allowed to perform tasks (or be present) in areas where they could be exposed to the material. In addition, the contractor has established an administrative action limit (the point at which additional controls or restrictions are necessary) at a level well below the DOE-set exposure limit, which is in turn ten times more conservative than the level set by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Tasks with a potential for exposure may be performed only by employees who have been tested and are not sensitized to beryllium and have received special training. These personnel are required to use the appropriate protective equipment and are monitored for potential exposures.

The equipment proposed for transfer to a private company (fabrication equipment such as lathes, milling and boring machines, saws, and various tools) have been housed in buildings 272W and 328 – both of which are posted as “beryllium suspect” facilities because of work in prior decades that may have resulted in some beryllium contamination. Hundreds of samples within these fabrication shop buildings have so far not identified beryllium levels above Fluor's administrative limits.

The team concluded that regulatory requirements were being met overall, but also noted one area of noncompliance -- Fluor had notified and provided information to employees who were being monitored for beryllium exposure, but did not have a consistent practice of also sharing information with other employees in the same work areas.

The team also noted several areas where improvement in Fluor's prevention program is needed. They include:

- Increasing the rigor of assessments to determine potential for personal and public exposure to beryllium;
- Improving hazard characterization by implementing a more random and controlled sampling plan and determining whether lower beryllium detection limits are possible;

- Improving hazard analysis to better assess potential worker exposure;
- Greater communication with the workforce at large on beryllium-related topics such as medical surveillance, hazards of beryllium, industrial hygiene hazard characterization practices, sampling information and benefits/compensation programs for those affected by beryllium.

DOE has provided the team's report to Fluor and required the contractor to identify the corrective actions it will take to strengthen its program.

"We have pursued this issue aggressively from the beginning," said DOE-RL Manager Keith A. Klein. "And while we are gratified by the team's confirmation that there has been no compromise of worker health and safety, we will ensure that necessary improvements are made. It's not just a matter of meeting applicable requirements. It's about strengthening the program and increasing the confidence level of Hanford workers and the public."

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