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Department of Energy Issues Records of Decision for Hanford Waste Management and Disposal

WASHINGTON, DC -- The U.S. Department of Energy today issued Records of Decision for the Solid Waste Program at its Hanford Site in Richland, Washington.

First, responding to concerns of Northwest states, stakeholders, and tribes, the Department addressed a longstanding controversy about importation of offsite low-level and mixed low-level waste. The Department announced that it is setting a limit for importation of such waste to the Hanford Site in Washington State that is 75% less than the amounts it evaluated for potential disposal there.

The Department's January 2004 Final Hanford Site Solid (Radioactive and Hazardous) Waste Environmental Impact Statement EIS analyzed the potential consequences of disposing of up to 220,000 cubic meters of low-level waste (LLW) and 140,000 cubic meters of mixed low-level waste (MLLW) from other Department of Energy (DOE) sites around the nation. Though no significant environmental impacts were found for the disposal, the Record of Decision (ROD) signed today by DOE Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management Jessie Roberson limits what may be sent to Hanford to 62,000 cubic meters of LLW and 20,000 cubic meters of MLLW.

In addition, Assistant Secretary Roberson announced that the Department will immediately cease the disposal of low-level waste in unlined trenches. Under today's ROD a new, lined facility for disposal of LLW and MLLW will be constructed. This Integrated Disposal Facility will be operational in 2007; until then, DOE will dispose of LLW and MLLW waste in existing lined waste disposal facilities.

"The Department has worked hard to ensure that only the waste most suited for disposal at Hanford will be sent there," Roberson said. "We have set strict limits for the amount of waste Hanford can accept, and we will ensure that disposal activities are protective of the environment and meet regulatory requirements. Use of unlined trenches for disposal

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was a big concern to our stakeholders and the states of Washington and Oregon; we heard and addressed those concerns." The waste must conform to disposal criteria through a process of sampling, surveying, reviews of characterization data and records, process knowledge, and x-ray.

Other provisions in the Record of Decision include DOE's plans to:

- develop capabilities to treat MLLW for disposal at Hanford
- close onsite disposal facilities (unlined trenches)
- continue comprehensive groundwater cleanup and monitoring, consistent with recently-signed regulatory commitments agreed to by the State of Washington
- use existing and modified Hanford facilities for the storage, processing and certification of transuranic waste prior to its shipment to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, New Mexico for disposal.

In making the announcements today, Assistant Secretary Roberson pointed to significant progress at Hanford over the last few years, including completing stabilization of all remaining plutonium, demolishing the first plutonium concentration facility, and progress toward having all spent nuclear fuel out of the K Basins and five million tons of contaminated soil excavated and disposed of later this year.

Second, based on the analysis in the EIS, the Department of Energy also issued a Record of Decision reconfirming its September 6, 2002 decision to transport small amounts of transuranic waste from the Battelle West Jefferson North Site in Columbus, Ohio to Hanford for processing and certification for disposal at WIPP, provided an earlier NEPA-based preliminary injunction is lifted.

In a separate action, DOE issued a third Record of Decision announcing its intent to dispose of defense transuranic waste containing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in greater than 50 parts per million at WIPP. These wastes are currently located at Hanford, the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory in Idaho, the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site in Colorado, the Savannah River Site in South Carolina, the Oak Ridge Site in Tennessee, and the Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory in New York.

Records of Decision are available to the public at http://www.em.doe.gov/rods.

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