

# HANFORD ADVISORY BOARD

*A Site Specific Advisory Board, Chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act*

**Advising:**

US Dept of Energy  
US Environmental  
Protection Agency  
Washington State  
Dept of Ecology

June 8, 2012

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Matt McCormick, Manager  
U.S. Department of Energy, Richland Operations  
P.O. Box 550 (A7-50)  
Richland, WA 99352

Re: Employee Concerns Program

Dear Messrs. Samuelson and McCormick,

**Background:**

The Employee Concerns Programs (ECP) at Hanford are an integral part of the safety culture. It is imperative that both the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and their contractors have a robust, credible, and trusted employee concerns system that provides an independent avenue for employees to bring forth their issues without fear of reprisal. Without trustworthy and effective internal avenues, employees may choose to remain silent or find outside avenues to raise their issues.

Both the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) and the DOE Office of Health, Safety and Security (DOE-HSS) have issued reports that include findings critical of the Employee Concerns function at both the DOE and contractor levels. These include a finding from the DNFSB that states:

Previous independent reviews, contractor surveys, investigations, and other efforts by DOE and contractors demonstrate repeated, continuing identification of the same safety culture deficiencies without effective resolution. (Recommendation 2011-1 to the Secretary of Energy – *Safety Culture at the Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plan*; June 2011).

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**HAB Consensus Advice # 255**  
Subject: Employee Concerns Program  
Adopted: June 8, 2012  
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Similarly, the DOE-HSS Report made the following finding:

Some interviewees indicated a fear of retaliation if they were to use the ECP. They perceive that it is not anonymous and that information is shared without their permission. (*Independent Oversight Assessment of Nuclear Safety Culture Concerns at the Hanford Site Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant*, Office of Enforcement and Oversight, DOE Health, Safety and Security, January 2012)

DOE-HSS also evaluated some elements of the contractor's Employee Concerns Program and had several findings and recommendations, both positive and negative. It is clear from these reports that there is a widespread dissatisfaction with both DOE and the contractor Employee Concerns Programs, and both programs suffer from a lack of trust amongst a significant portion of the workforce.

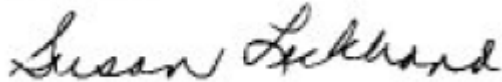
The Hanford Advisory Board (HAB or Board) recognizes that DOE is beginning to address the Employee Concerns Program issues brought to fore by DOE-HSS and the DNFSB. In particular, the Board appreciates the Near Term Improvement Action Item numbers 7 and 8 and encourages DOE to implement those actions. In addition, the Board notes that DOE has issued a "Continuous Improvement Plan" for the Employee Concerns Program that addresses many of the Board's concerns.

**Advice:**

- The Board advises DOE and its contractors to consider including non-management personnel (exempt, non-exempt, & Hanford Atomic Metal Trades Council) in developing and promulgating employee concerns procedures, policies, and processes, including those addressing personnel protections when submitting concerns into the system. Involving the users of a planned system in its development and presentation can result in a final product that employees will respond to because it more directly meets their needs.
- The Board advises DOE to reconsider reinstating the Office of River Protection (DOE-ORP) Employee Concerns Program, utilizing best practices to increase employee confidence in the DOE-ORP Employee Concerns Program. The Board believes DOE-ORP is better able to address the particular issues raised by DOE-ORP employees and Tank Farms, WTP, and 222 S-Laboratory contractor employees.
- The Board advises the DOE Employee Concerns Programs at Hanford to rigorously investigate and address any and all allegations of reprisal by employees

for raising a concern, as well as any potential chilling effect that may have resulted (whether alleged or validated) within the workforce. Any finding by the Employee Concerns Program of reprisal or discrimination against an employee for raising an issue should be acted upon by the agency in a manner that provides redress to the employee and accountability to the contractor personnel responsible for the reprisal.

Sincerely,



Susan Leckband, Chair  
Hanford Advisory Board

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*This advice represents Board consensus for this specific topic. It should not be taken out of context to extrapolate Board agreement on other subject matters.*

cc: Glenn Podonsky, Chief Health, Safety and Security Office, U.S. Department of Energy Headquarters  
Dana Bryson, Deputy Designated Official, U.S. Department of Energy, Richland Operations Office  
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Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board