

# Carol Van Strum

Dear U.S. Department of Energy, Washington Department of Ecology, and U.S. EPA

The Columbia River is the lifeblood of the Northwest. The U.S. government must act to protect the River from highly radioactive and toxic pollution at the Hanford Nuclear Site. This includes honoring the commitments made in Treaties with Tribal Nations at Hanford, and recognizing that the nuclear waste created at Hanford has caused immeasurable harm to Tribal communities and others who depend on the Columbia River.

We are calling on the TPA agencies to undertake the most protective cleanup possible, given the enormously high stakes for the Columbia River and everyone who depends on it.

In developing changes to the Tri-Party Agreement and the Consent Decree, we demand that:

The federal government treats tank waste as the law requires. The Nuclear Waste Policy Act defines tank waste as high-level waste. Rather than forbearing the use of a new, weaker definition of high-level waste, Energy should permanently abandon plans to apply this definition at Hanford;

The TPA agencies provide adequate information and opportunities for the public to comment on major proposed changes to cleanup, such as the adequacy of proposed new tank capacity and the proposal to ship large volumes of tank waste through communities in liquid or solid form;

Ecology and EPA explain why the standard “as good as glass” applies to treated and immobilized tank waste in Washington, but not elsewhere.

Environmental reviews are available to the public to review while commenting on the proposed changes. The agencies seem to be putting the cart before the horse, making sweeping changes to Hanford’s cleanup plan and finalizing a settlement without having conducted a full environmental NEPA and SEPA analysis of the impacts of its decisions.

The 2024 date for selecting a grouting alternative be removed from the proposed changes. This date is inappropriate and premature, it is not possible to have the information necessary to make such a decision at this time, much less provide the public, Tribes, states, stakeholders, and every person impacted by the storage, transportation, and disposition of tank waste notification so that they can consent to the risks being imposed upon them.

Finalization of the proposed changes be delayed until Tribal Nations have consulted with the TPA Agencies on the proposal. This should have happened prior to the settlement going public, robust consultation is not equivalent to after-the-fact “familiarization,” with decisions that directly impact the lives and livelihoods of generations of Indigenous people. The settlement is astoundingly inappropriate in this regard, lacking entirely an analysis of how the people most impacted by these decisions will navigate the hazards and harms imposed on them.

