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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hanford Challenge Urges Significant NRC Role in Vitrification Plant and Tank Waste Issues

WHERE: Hanford House Red Lion, 802 George Washington Way
Richland, Washington

WHEN: Wednesday, February 13 – 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has been directed by Congress to review regulatory processes at the Department of Energy's Waste Treatment Plant. Hanford's highly radioactive liquid waste, currently stored in leak-prone tanks, is to be vitrified (immobilized in glass logs) at the Waste Treatment Plant, a \$12+ billion project that has been plagued by design problems and delays for years.

The NRC was involved in oversight of the Waste Treatment Plant (WTP) from 1997 – 2000. Upon losing its regulatory power, the NRC issued a close-out report that exposed design problems and concluded that the plant, if built to the current specification, could pose an unacceptable safety risk in its 25-year operational life. The Department of Energy has yet to respond to this report or address many of the NRC's greatest concerns. Bringing the NRC back to the site to evaluate DOE's progress and the current state of the WTP is "a good first step in getting the Waste Treatment Plant back on track," says Tom Carpenter, Executive Director of [Hanford Challenge](#).

Carpenter was instrumental in bringing to Congress' attention the need for outside review of DOE's regulatory processes. "Vitrification is a promising technology, but the current approach at WTP has not been working. Hanford Challenge is advocating for significant renewed NRC involvement and oversight at the Waste Treatment Plant and even the tank waste retrieval project since the two are so fundamentally linked." Carpenter pointed to the July 2007 spill of 85 gallons of high-level tank waste on the ground as just the latest in a series of preventable accidents justifying external oversight.

Hanford Challenge supports holding the Waste Treatment Plant to the same standards as commercial nuclear facilities, which are given license to operate by the NRC only after thorough review of regulatory practices. "There are going to be millions of gallons of hazardous radioactive liquid pumped through this facility and subjected to extremely high temperatures," says Carpenter. "We need to know exactly what is going to happen when this facility is switched on. What we want to avoid is having the start of operations be the start of a whole new set of contamination problems. The review from an outside party with experience in these matters is a welcome start."

The public is welcome to attend the meeting, which will include an introduction to the NRC's plans for reviewing practices at WTP followed by over two hours of public questions and comment.