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

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Dave Brockman, Manager
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Shirley Olinger, Manager
U.S. Department of Energy, Office of River Protection
P.O. Box 450 (H6-60)
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Re: Beryllium Disease Prevention at Hanford

Dear Mr. Brockman and Ms. Olinger,

Background

Beryllium represents a very serious potential risk to many Hanford employees, often without their knowledge. When certain sensitive individuals are exposed to even minute amounts of inhaled Beryllium, they are at considerable risk of becoming beryllium sensitized and contracting a potentially fatal granulomatous lung disease called chronic beryllium disease (CBD) and an increased risk of lung cancer.

To date there have been twenty-seven verified cases of CBD in employees at Hanford. Six of these cases have been diagnosed since 2007. One CBD employee has died of lung cancer and one employee uses oxygen twenty-four hours a day. Many need chronic or intermittent steroids for less advanced CBD. In addition, there have been eighty-eight confirmed cases of sensitivity to beryllium from the surveillance program using the Beryllium Lymphocyte Proliferation Test (BeLPT). This test of activated sensitivity can be a precursor to future CBD.

From a worker safety perspective based on the number of affected workers, beryllium currently rates as a greater hazard than radiation.

Not every individual who is exposed to beryllium will experience adverse health effects. Studies have shown that on average, 2% to 6% of exposed workers develop sensitivity, although the rates can be as high as 20% among workers with the highest exposures, such as beryllium machinists.

