



# PRESS STATEMENT

## **Bechtel's Report on Safety Culture at Hanford Finds No Problem, Blames Safety Oversight for Causing Hostility**

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*Seattle, WA:* Hanford Challenge today sharply criticized a report from a team of contractor-selected experts that it says downplayed the seriousness of safety culture problems at the Hanford nuclear site.

“The report is a veiled attack on safety-culture oversight. It failed to acknowledge some of the most explicit indicators of the vit plant’s flawed safety culture. There was no mention of disclosures from three important safety experts on the Waste Treatment Plant who have gone public and filed concerns about suppression of technical and safety issues and putting schedule and cost before safety,” said Tom Carpenter, Executive Director of Hanford Challenge. Carpenter noted that this includes the Manager of Nuclear and Environmental Safety, DOE’s top scientist on the project, and the former Manager for Research and Technology.

The report was issued by the Independent Safety and Quality Culture Assessment (ISQCA) team that recently assessed the nuclear safety and quality culture at the Department of Energy (DOE) Hanford Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant (WTP). Its report was released today along with a briefing that included a question and answer session.

“Bechtel’s report has no credibility. Despite the recommendation from the DNFSB that DOE conduct an independent investigation into the safety culture issue, Bechtel hand-picked a group of experts who were reportedly paid \$1.5 million to look into the issue and used Bechtel’s law firm, Pillsbury, to interpret survey results. Does that sound independent?” asked Carpenter.

The report identified four findings, including “no widespread evidence of a chilled atmosphere adverse to safety, and no widespread evidence that DOE and contractor management suppress technical dissent.” Employees’ statements of reluctance to raise concerns were dismissed as “isolated expressions” by the Bechtel team.

“The business of fixing the safety culture has to begin with an acknowledgment that there has been suppression and a chilling effect on reporting concerns. The report dismissed existing problems by concluded that any safety culture issue at the Waste Treatment Plant is the fault of the whistleblowers themselves and the groups that support them, like the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board” said Carpenter.

Bechtel's report blamed the perception of safety culture problems on a "lack of effective and timely disposition of technical and safety issues," and "safety construct implementation does not support project schedule."

The Bechtel report also disagreed with the findings of a federal agency, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) which issued findings and recommendations to the Secretary of Energy in June 2011. Bechtel's report stated that the team's findings "do not support DNFSB Findings 1 and 2 in Recommendation 2011-1. That is, the ISQCA team found no widespread evidence of a chilled atmosphere adverse to safety and no widespread evidence that DOE and Contractor Management suppress technical dissent."

During the question and answer session, the Bechtel panel stated that Bechtel should have more fully "explained" its actions to terminate Dr. Walt Tamosaitis in July 2010, saying there were "two sides to the dispute." Yet, the Bechtel panel admitted it did not investigate the circumstances of Dr. Tamosaitis dismissal.

"Bechtel's persistent refusal to accept the DNFSB findings is further evidence that this contractor would rather continue business as usual -- which includes suppressing technical dissent and retaliating against its own technical staff -- rather than establish and maintain a robust safety culture," said Carpenter.

The Executive Summary of the report also identified where it did see a problem: "It appears that a very significant contributor to this important problem is the management and performance of the Environmental and Nuclear Safety (E&NS) organization, and its direct impact on safety culture." This is the group that is responsible for assuring compliance with regulatory requirements and laws, and is often seen as an impediment to progress because of its insistence of following nuclear safety requirements. "It is very revealing that the Bechtel expert team called out the compliance organization as the source of the problem," said Carpenter.

Bechtel's panel blamed the DNFSB itself: "The conduct of the DNFSB oversight activities ... had the unwanted effect of instigating a series of hostile reactions and interactions that have burdened the normally constructive relationships among the Board, DOE, and its contractors."

"The inference in this finding is that DNFSB is itself to blame for any hostility for doing its job by raising safety issues, holding hearings, and conducting oversight," said Carpenter. "The report seems to say, if only the DNFSB and the concerned employees would stop raising safety issues, people would get along better. However, this will not result in a safe or effective plant."

Hanford Challenge calls for Congress to take action and exercise appropriate oversight over the Department of Energy's continued refusal to acknowledge and correct what the DNFSB has [clearly identified](#) as a flawed safety culture in which "DOE and contractor project management behaviors reinforce a subculture at WTP that deters the timely reporting, acknowledgement, and ultimate resolution of technical safety concerns."