



February 18, 2011

Dear Friend,

Hanford Challenge has learned that the Department of Energy may have sought to improperly influence public testimony provided at a hearing on the Hanford Waste Treatment Plant held by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board held last fall.

A trade publication called the *Weapons Complex Monitor* reported that over the past several weeks, the Board has sought information from DOE and industry officials, including through the use of subpoenas, in regard to concerns that those employed on the project may feel unable to express safety issues. The investigation is believed to be part of the Board's broader ongoing investigation into the safety culture at the Waste Treatment Plant (also known as the vit plant), which was launched after a senior official, Dr. Walt Tamosaitis, was removed from the project in response to raising safety concerns.

Among those subpoenaed were senior officials who were witnesses at the Board's public hearing last October in Kennewick, Washington. That meeting examined several areas of concern having to do with the design of the vitrification facility, chiefly centering on the susceptibility of the design to hydrogen gas explosions and/or ignitability, nuclear criticality, and the possibility of pipe plugging, among other issues.

Hanford Challenge has raised concerns over the safety culture at the Hanford vit plant after a former senior WTP official, Dr. Walter Tamosaitis, was removed from the project after raising safety issues. He subsequently filed a whistleblower complaint with the Department of Labor and a lawsuit against Bechtel National and URS officials. Tamosaitis' concerns prompted several investigations into the safety culture at the WTP, including the one currently underway by the Board. "Dr. Tamosaitis is well known to be a very credible individual. And because of that, and because of the fact that he's making these allegations and he's suggesting he has documentation to back it up, we feel it's prudent to pursue it and have an investigation," Winokur was quoted as saying to the *Weapons Complex Monitor* last July.

We are encouraged that the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board is taking an active interest in the safety culture issues at the Waste Treatment Plant. The ability of workers to safely raise safety concerns is critical. We hope the Department of Energy takes positive steps both to address Dr. Tamosaitis' situation and the safety culture in general. Its silence and inaction speak louder than words. Hanford Challenge will continue to closely monitor the situation, and contribute in a positive manner where we are able to do so.

Sincerely,

Tom Carpenter  
Executive Director