

ACTION ALERT!

Public Comment on the [Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board \(DNFSB\) Recommendations](#) on addressing the flawed safety culture at Hanford's Waste Treatment Plant (WTP) is now being taken until July 20, 2011. The Comment period was published in the [Federal Register](#) on June 20, 2011.

A federal agency tasked with investigating nuclear safety at federal facilities issued a strongly-worded letter to the Secretary of Energy on June 9, 2011 finding that **“the safety culture at the Waste Treatment Plant is in need of prompt, major improvement and that corrective actions will only be successful and enduring if championed by the Secretary of Energy.”**

The Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board (DNFSB, the Board) interviewed 45 witnesses and examined 30,000 pages of documents during its investigation. DNFSB Chairman Peter Winokur wrote: “The Board's investigative record demonstrates that both DOE and contractor project management behaviors reinforce a subculture at WTP that deters the timely reporting, acknowledgement, and ultimate resolution of technical safety concerns.”

A broken safety-culture at the vit plant could have disastrous consequences. The DNFSB warned that the **“successful completion of WTP's mission to remove and stabilize high-level waste from the tank farms is essential to protect the health and safety of the public and workers at Hanford. However, the flawed safety culture currently embedded in the project has a substantial probability of jeopardizing that mission.”**



The safety culture investigation by the Defense Board was initiated after **Dr. Walter Tamosaitis**, the Research and Technology Manager for the WTP was abruptly removed from his position after raising a set of safety issues related to the design of the plant. The letter commented that his termination “sent a strong message to other WTP project employees that individuals who question current practices or provide alternative points of view are not considered team players and will be dealt with harshly.”

The Board found that “expressions of technical dissent affecting safety at WTP, especially those affecting schedule or budget, were discouraged, if not opposed or rejected without review. Project management subtly, consistently, and effectively communicated to employees that

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differing professional opinions counter to decisions reached by management were not welcome and would not be dealt with on their merits. There is a firm belief among WTP project personnel that persisting in a dissenting argument can lead, as in the case of Dr. Tamosaitis, to the employee being removed from the project or reassigned to other duties. As of the writing of this finding, Dr. Tamosaitis sits in a basement cubicle in Richland with no meaningful work. His isolated physical placement by contractor management and the lack of meaningful work is seen by many as a constant reminder of what management will do to an employee who raises issues that might impact budget or schedule.”

The letter criticized the US Department of Energy (US DOE) and Bechtel, with the Board calling for US DOE to end reprisals against those who raise safety concerns.

The Board concluded that **“the WTP project is not maintaining a safety conscious work environment where personnel feel free to raise safety concerns without fear of retaliation, intimidation, harassment, or discrimination.”**

The Board recommended that the DOE “assert federal control at the highest level” and correct the deficiencies. Finally the Board recommended that the DOE ascertain whether the chilled work environment extended to other parts of Hanford, and that the DOE conduct an “independent and non-adversarial review” of the treatment of Dr. Tamosaitis by both DOE and contractor management and the effect it has had on the work culture.

The public has a chance to weigh in with a public comment on the Board’s recommendations, on the Secretary of Energy’s response (due in early August).

SUMMARY: Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 2286a(a)(5), the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board has made a recommendation to the Secretary of Energy concerning the safety culture at the Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant located at the Hanford site in the state of Washington.

DATES: Comments, data, views, or arguments concerning the recommendation are due on or before July 20, 2011.

ADDRESSES: Send comments, data, views, or arguments concerning this recommendation to:

**Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
625 Indiana Avenue, NW.
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20004–2901.**

OR Email: andrewt@dnfsb.gov

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

**Brian Grosner or Andrew L. Thibadeau
at the address above or telephone
number (202) 694-7000**

Click [here](#) and [here](#) for a sample of the media coverage on the DNFSB letter and recommendation. Visit our [webpage](#) for more background on the Waste Treatment Plant, Dr. Tamosaitis, and the current controversy.

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