



# PRESS RELEASE

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## Department of Energy Official “In the Loop” on Termination of Prominent Whistleblower

*“Walt is killing us”*

*Kennewick, WA:* Evidence was [released](#) this week showing that a Federal Project Manager was involved in the removal of a senior technical manager who blew the whistle on safety and technical concerns at the Hanford Nuclear Site in southeastern Washington.

Department of Energy (DOE) manager, Dale Knutson<sup>1</sup>, had earlier provided a sworn statement in a court proceeding that he did not direct Bechtel or URS, two contractors at the Hanford site, to “take any specific actions” in relation to Dr. Walter Tamosaitis, who was removed from his position after he raised significant safety concerns related to the design of the Waste Treatment Plant (WTP) at Hanford.

However, the evidence released by Dr. Tamosaitis’ attorney, Jack Sheridan, reveals that Knutson was certainly involved in decision-making leading to Dr. Tamosaitis’ removal. One email string between Bechtel’s Project Director Frank Russo for the Waste Treatment Plant and DOE’s Dale Knutson, shows extreme frustration with Dr. Tamosaitis in the days leading up to his removal. On July 1, 2010, Russo wrote to URS Vice President William Gay: **“Walt is killing us. Get him in your corporate office today.”**

Responding to an email from Dr. Tamosaitis which outlined the need for a large-scale test that would delay the closing of an important design issue, Knutson wrote to Russo that “Walt does not speak for DOE,” and that **“Deliberate haste will be our approach. Please use this email as you see fit to accelerate staffing changes”** and to **“color”** his (Russo’s) conversations with his Bechtel corporate management.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Knutson is an employee of the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and is on assignment within the Department of Energy.

Russo responded on July 1 in the same email string to Knutson, **“I directed URS to get Walt out of here 2 weeks ago after meeting with Mike Kluse [of contractor PNNL]. Today I told Gay that Walt will no longer be paid by WTP.”**

The following morning, on July 2, 2010, Dr. Tamosaitis was met at the front door of the WTP office by URS officials, taken to a conference room where he was removed from his position at Hanford, and escorted off the Hanford property without explanation. He is still employed by URS, though he is assigned to a basement office performing no meaningful work, and with no title. Dr. Tamosaitis has sued Bechtel and URS alleging that he was retaliated against for whistleblowing, and filed a complaint with the Department of Labor that alleges discrimination against him, and naming the DOE as a respondent. Dr. Tamosaitis’ complaint alleges that just before his removal, he raised safety and technical concerns that raised questions as to whether Bechtel would meet a contract milestone that would result in a multi-million dollar fee award.

Finally, an email dated July 5, 2010, from a URS Vice President, William Gay, who was Dr. Tamosaitis’ boss, stated, **“This action was initiated by Dale Knudsen (sic) probably not knowing the sensitivity.”**

The emails made public this week were obtained in discovery, as part of the court proceedings.

Bechtel and URS are the contractors hired by the Department of Energy (DOE) to design and construct the Waste Treatment Plant, which will mix and treat Hanford’s high-level nuclear waste into glass for ultimate disposal in a deep geological repository. The Waste Treatment Plant is under scrutiny for huge cost overruns, schedule delays and poor quality practices. Dr. Tamosaitis specifically raised issues that could affect the safe operation of the facility, specifically issues that could result in hydrogen gas explosions and nuclear criticality concerns.

Another government agency, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, is examining the technical and safety concerns raised by Dr. Tamosaitis. Correspondence has surfaced that reveals that the Board is also investigating alleged witness tampering that may have occurred at an October 2010 Board hearing in the Tri-Cities.

Hanford Challenge Executive Director Tom Carpenter stated, “Initially we were told that Dr. Tamosaitis’ removal was a natural and planned evolution of his work scope, and that the Energy Department was not involved in the decision to remove him. The new evidence reveals a retaliatory culture that raises questions about the integrity and character of those whom we entrust to design, build and operate our most sensitive and dangerous nuclear facilities. We call on Congress to order an independent investigation of these matters.”

- ["Walt is killing us" email string with DOE comment](#)
- [Email string between Russo and Knutson](#)
- [DOE Knutson Declaration](#)
- [Email from Gay to Sain, “this action was initiated by Dale Knudsen”](#)
- Click [here](#) to view a copy of the complaint filed in Benton County Superior Court
- Click [here](#) to view a copy of the broadened DOL complaint which is being investigated by OSHA

For more information, see Hanford Challenge’s [website](#).