

New Independent Council to Resolve Whistleblower Concerns

Richland, WA – An independent council will commence operations today, June 27, 2005, to resolve whistleblower concerns regarding workplace safety, health and environment at the Hanford site. The Hanford Concerns Council (HCC) is an independent, ten member body which will utilize customized conflict resolution and mediation methods.

HCC will operate under a unique Charter agreement that brings worker advocates, contractor representatives, and neutral perspectives together to resolve worker concerns and underlying operational issues. Initially, the Council will be available only to employees of CH2M HILL Hanford Group, although other companies have the opportunity to join the agreement.

At a signing ceremony in Pasco today, Roy Schepens, Manager of the Office of River Protection (ORP), Ed Aromi, President and General Manager of CH2M HILL, and Tom Carpenter, Nuclear Oversight Program Director of the Government Accountability Project (GAP) pledged their cooperation to assist the Council in resolving complex employee concerns. Schepens stated, "The unique challenge of cleaning up 53 million gallons of chemical and radioactive tank waste calls for unique solutions. This independent board provides an objective review of complex concerns in a timely manner, with outcomes that will be agreeable to all parties. This will assure the safe completion of our cleanup mission at Hanford."

CH2M HILL commits to implement any consensus recommendation of the Council. ORP will cooperate in the implementation, and both CH2M HILL and ORP will respond to further observations on any underlying problems that arise during the case resolution process. Aromi commented, "Our commitment to maintaining a safety conscious work environment is based on the dignity and well being of our employees. The Hanford Concerns Council will provide an independent voice and perspective in the resolution of safety concerns."

GAP, a nonprofit watchdog group and whistleblower protection organization, has been involved with Hanford employee concerns since the late 1980's. GAP will encourage employees to utilize the HCC process when appropriate. Carpenter of GAP commented, "The Concerns Council represents a unique avenue for employees to identify and resolve concerns in a safe environment, without giving up their rights. Especially in a complex workplace like Hanford, it is essential that every employee can be heard. GAP encourages CH2M HILL employees to utilize this process when they feel that their concerns are not being adequately addressed through the normal channels."

Bringing concerns to HCC does not preclude an employee from pursuing further avenues if a solution is not reached, although other processes must be put on hold. The Council is specifically designed to resolve complex cases that are not amenable to regular site channels. Depending upon the case load, HCC expects to resolve cases in three to four months. The Council is available at no cost to employees. Washington's Governor Christine Gregoire observed, "This new council fills an important role by ensuring that no tank farm issue will be overlooked and no

one pushed aside when they come forward to protect fellow workers, the environment and the community. Its existence will enhance both accountability for the site and dignity for workers. I commend CH2M HILL, the Government Accountability Project and the Office of River Protection for their agreement to cooperate, and urge other companies to join in this constructive and proven approach.”

The structure and many of the processes in this new entity are derived from the Hanford Joint Council (HJC), a similar independent process that operated successfully at Hanford from 1994 to 2003. During its tenure, that entity resolved approximately 50 cases, and every consensus recommendation was implemented by the companies involved.

The Council is chaired by Jonathan Brock, a professor at UW’s Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs. Under the agreement, the chair directs resolution activities and brings forward Council recommendations. Brock stated, “At facilities with operations and histories like Hanford, some concerns inevitably require direct, immediate, and independent attention outside of the normal processes.” The Council has the authority to hire independent technical experts to assist with its case assessments or other activities, and to recommend interim measures to prevent further escalation or retaliation.”

Senator Patty Murray said of the Council, “Safety at Hanford matters to all of us. The cooperation of the Office of River Protection, CH2M HILL and the Government Accountability Project in providing an independent forum for whistleblowers is an exemplary and critical step forward for workers, the community, and the environment.”

The HCC office is located in Kennewick. Additional information can be found on the website www.hanfordconcernscouncil.org. Contact can be made anonymously through a web inquiry, or confidentially to HCC administrator Sherry Arnold at arnold@hanfordconcernscouncil.org or by phone (509) 783-5695.