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## **Independent Panel Reviews Technical Basis For Worker Protection Practices At Hanford Tank Farms**

*Kennewick, WA* - An expert committee selected by the Hanford Concerns Council has evaluated CH2M HILL's *Industrial Hygiene Chemical Vapor Technical Basis*. The 2006 *Technical Basis* document provides the foundation for worker protection practices at the Hanford Tank Farms. The evaluation, commissioned at the joint request of CH2M HILL and Hanford Challenge, was publicly released today.

This evaluation, conducted at the joint request of a Hanford contractor and public advocacy community, represents a unique approach to problem-solving at the site. The Council is comprised of representatives of Hanford Challenge, CH2M HILL and neutral members who are unaffiliated with the site. The Council's balanced membership and involvement in the process of evaluating the *Technical Basis* document fostered an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual understanding of the findings and conclusions.

After a nationwide search, the Council selected by consensus the members of the evaluation committee - three nationally-known experts in toxicology, industrial hygiene and occupational medicine. The panel of experts were Dr. Hanspeter Witschi, Professor Emeritus, University of California at Davis, Dr. Patrick Breyse of Johns Hopkins University, and Dr. Al Franzblau of the University of Michigan.

Hanford Challenge, a nonprofit organization directed by Tom Carpenter, gives CH2M HILL credit for participating in the study. "CH2M HILL's agreement to fund and participate in this study shows commitment to worker safety, and to an open and transparent review of the technical underpinnings of their worker protection program."

The study concluded that the methodology employed by CH2M HILL for developing the *Technical Basis* document is consistent with industry best practices for setting Acceptable Occupational Exposure Levels. However, the committee questioned whether the source and exposure sampling data which underlie the *Technical Basis* provide sufficient certainty about the risk of worker exposures. Specifically, the committee concluded the technical document does not sufficiently reduce uncertainties about the variation and potential maximum concentrations of hazardous constituents in both tank headspaces, and worker breathing zones. Recognizing that their conclusions did not include a detailed review of implementation of the *Technical Basis* document, the committee suggested some possible strategies to reduce uncertainties including: 1) adjustments to headspace and breathing space sampling and personnel monitoring strategies; 2)

lowering the screening levels used to identify chemicals of potential concern; 3) including known or potential carcinogens identified in tank sampling in routine monitoring by adding them to the list of chemicals of potential concern; and 4) ensuring that the *Technical Basis* remains a dynamic instrument which continues to incorporate new sampling data and developments in the relevant scientific and regulatory arenas.

CH2M HILL and Hanford Challenge recognize that this assessment is not an end point, but a basis for ongoing efforts to ensure safe worker protection practices. The Council will continue to work with the Department of Energy and Washington River Protection Solutions (WRPS) which will take over the tank farms contract on October 1<sup>st</sup> to ensure that the committee's conclusions are appropriately considered.

Jonathan Brock, the Council chair, gives credit to all parties participating in the process. "The willingness of CH2M HILL and Hanford Challenge to initiate this evaluation, and of WRPS and DOE to continue the process during the transition of contractors, demonstrates a real concern for workplace safety. We are pleased that WRPS has agreed to review the report, determine what further actions might be warranted, and perhaps continue to use the Council as a facilitator."

Washington River Protection Solutions President Bill Johnson said, "We want to take advantage of any resource that will help enhance the safety of our work force. We will review the committee's recommendations against the present situation and will use this information in our own review of the industrial hygiene program and other safety programs. We are committed also to encouraging worker input on the findings and conclusions of this evaluation as we make ongoing improvements."

CH2M HILL's CEO John Fulton said, "We readily committed to an independent evaluation and to consideration of its findings in our continued efforts to ensure worker safety. Even while the evaluation was underway, we continued to make progress in implementing the approach developed in the *Technical Basis*, including Tank Farm characterization based upon additional source, workplace and personnel sampling. CH2M HILL was fully prepared to review the evaluation and make use of its findings, in conjunction with the additional sampling results we have obtained subsequent to the *Technical Basis*, as part of our ongoing improvements, but the transition will take place before we can finish the task. We are pleased that WRPS, with DOE support, has agreed to continue the process. We believe this kind of continuity is essential to our common obligations to workers and overall site safety."

Tom Carpenter said, "This evaluation found a number of areas where worker protection practices can be improved, so immediate attention is warranted in order to ensure worker safety. We hope this can all be done quickly so that workers have all appropriate protections according to best practices."

"ORP appreciates the leadership that both CH2M HILL and the Hanford Concerns Council provided in sponsoring this independent review," said Department of Energy Office of River Protection Manager Shirley J. Olinger. "We look forward to working with WRPS, the Hanford Concerns Council, and Hanford Challenge to continue strengthening the safety culture in Hanford's tank farms."

A copy of the report can be accessed at the Council's website [www.hanfordconcernscouncil.org](http://www.hanfordconcernscouncil.org)