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CH2M HILL Joins Hanford Concerns Council

RICHLAND, WASH, March 22, 2010 – The Hanford Concerns Council announced today that the CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company (CH2M HILL) is becoming a member of the Hanford Concerns Council (HCC), an independent partnership designed to resolve employee concerns of workplace safety, worker health, and environmental hazards. Adding CH2M HILL brings the number of contractors to three who make the Council services available to employees, bringing the total number of employees to more than 5,300, and greatly increasing the range of work at Hanford potentially covered by the Council's unique services in addressing hard-to-resolve concerns. The Council responds to concerns brought to it by employees.

The Concerns Council was created in June 2005 as a result of agreement by CH2M HILL Hanford Group, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of River Protection and Government Accountability Project. At that time the number of employees with access to the Council was just over 1,100.

The Council provides an independent means for employees to resolve concerns that are not likely to be resolved working through internal site channels. It uses a special mediation process, tailored to the Hanford Site, which can simultaneously address the safety and health aspects of a concern, and ensure that employees do not have to fear for their jobs or status in the workplace. The issues are resolved in a fair and equitable manner outside of litigation or other formal conflict. The Council has a unique set of tools and ability to work on a confidential basis, granted through a charter agreement with participating companies, to ensure employees that their issues can be reviewed without repercussion.

The Council is chaired by University of Washington professor Jon Brock. "We welcome a CH2M HILL company back into the Council, giving PRC employees access to this channel for addressing concerns. The Council has developed some new ways to address complex concerns that will be valuable for concerned employees doing the work in the Plateau. Because the Council focuses on fixing problems, not fixing blame, we typically get to the bottom of things quickly and put the issues on a path to solution, and restore the employee to a productive work situation, usually with some improvement in safety practices and workplace relationships" said Brock.

“Because of the Council’s agreement with participating companies, it has the tools to thoroughly examine any concern, and protect the employee through the process. If someone has been reluctant to come forward from PRC, this event creates an immediate avenue for employees to bring out issues needing resolution. We try to turn these into opportunities for a contractor company to address safety and health or related systems issues. With the independence and confidentiality protections it has, the Council can proceed in situations where even the best-intentioned company can’t easily make progress. CH2M HILL is doing a very positive thing by making this system available to employees,” Brock said.

Washington River Protection Systems and Washington Closure Hanford, who won their present contracts earlier, are the existing contractor members. Hanford Challenge coordinates the employee advocacy membership.

“CH2M HILL has been a long-standing supporter of the Council at Hanford in order to foster open, honest communication with employees”, said CH2M HILL President John Lehew. “The Council is intended for those situations where an employee questions whether the regular channels can be fair or effective in resolving a particular health, safety or environmental protection issue and is designed to minimize the negative impacts on the concerned employee and the important work of the site.”

CH2M HILL is the U.S. Department of Energy’s contractor responsible for the safe environmental cleanup of the Central Plateau of the Hanford Site. The Plateau Remediation Contract is a \$4.5 billion, 10-year project that is paving the way for closure of the Hanford Site and focused on reducing risks to workers, the public, and the environment while at the same time protecting the Columbia River.

Tom Carpenter, director of Hanford Challenge, a non-profit regional public interest organization and a founder of the Council, welcomed the decision by CH2M HILL president John Lehew to join the Council. “We look forward to working with CH2M HILL and solving problems together in a setting that focuses on the important issues and is geared toward resolving concerns before they become serious issues,” said Carpenter. “We encourage CH2M HILL employees to utilize this process when they feel that their concerns are not being adequately addressed through the normal channels,” he said.

Council membership includes neutral members who are experienced in conflict resolution; external employee advocates familiar with health, safety and environmental concerns; and senior company managers acting independently of line management or other concerns programs. All members are pledged to confidentiality, and decision-making is consensus-based. Member companies agree to accept consensus recommendations. The Council’s offices are located in Kennewick, Washington. It is chartered as an independent non-profit organization and supported by DOE.

Department of Energy Richland Operations Manager David Brockman said, “I am glad to see that CH2M Hill has joined the HCC. I believe the HCC provides a useful alternate dispute resolution process that can be used when the contractor’s normal processes are not able to resolve especially complex issues”.

The Council has a long history of resolving difficult-to-solve cases in a manner that addresses the underlying concern and that provides protection for employees who raise such concerns. The Council's win-win approach has changed the dynamics of past interactions from confrontation and litigation to focusing on improving the cleanup and fostering better health and safety practices while preserving and improving relationships.

More information about HCC can be found at its Web site:
www.hanfordconcernscouncil.org

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