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Washington Closure Joins Hanford Concerns Council

“Problem-Solving” Council Expands Role at Hanford

Richland, WA – Washington Closure Hanford announced that it 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. The Concerns Council was created in June 2005 as a result of agreement by CH2M HILL, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of River Protection and Government Accountability Project.

The council provides an independent means for employees to resolve concerns that are not likely to be resolved working through normal channels. It uses a special mediation process, tailored to the Hanford Site, that can simultaneously address the safety and health aspects of a concern, and also ensure that employees do not have to fear for their jobs or status in the workplace. The Council is set up to deal with cases that are especially polarized, complex, or where there are other barriers to resolution. Rather than through litigation or conflict, the issues are resolved in a calm, fair and equitable manner.

The Council is chaired by University of Washington professor Jon Brock. “The Council is in the business of fixing problems, not fixing blame,” said Brock. “By working through the Council system, the employee is protected, safety is advanced for co-workers and the projects stay on track. When a company joins the Council, it creates an immediate opportunity for people who were reluctant to come forward to bring out their issues for resolution, and immediate opportunity for the company to address safety culture issues they may not have known about. By using our independent status and confidentiality protections, the Council can do things that even the best-intentioned company can’t do. We applaud Washington Closure’s decision to make this system available to employees,” Brock said.

“Cleaning up the Hanford site is risky business,” said Washington Closure President Chuck Spencer. “Many of the cleanup challenges we face are unknown, which means protecting the health and safety of our workers is our first priority. They play a vital role in protecting themselves and their coworkers when they raise concerns about workplace safety. Offering this additional avenue to our employees when they feel their concerns may not be adequately addressed through normal channels is a positive step for everyone.”

Washington Closure Hanford manages the River Corridor Closure Project at the U.S. Department of Energy’s 586-square-mile Hanford Site in southeastern Washington state. Washington Closure is responsible for cleaning up 370 radioactive and hazardous waste sites and burial grounds, demolishing 486 contaminated buildings, operating the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility, and performing surveillance and maintenance on remaining facilities.

Tom Carpenter, director of Hanford Challenge, a non-profit regional public interest organization and a founder of the Council under Government Accountability Project, welcomed the decision by Washington Closure President Chuck Spencer to join the Council. “We look forward to working with Washington Closure 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 Washington Closure employees to utilize this process when they feel that their concerns are not being adequately addressed through the normal channels,” he said.

To ensure a balanced perspective, the Council consists of three types of members: senior officials from participating companies, nuclear safety advocates, and neutral members with experience in solving workplace conflicts. All members are pledged to confidentiality, and decision-making is consensus-based. Member companies agree to accept any consensus recommendations. The Council’s offices are located in Kennewick, Washington. It is chartered as an independent non-profit organization. The activity is supported by DOE.

"Getting issues resolved and keeping the focus on working safely is of paramount importance to the Department of Energy," said Dave Brockman, DOE Richland Operations Office Manager. "We believe the Council and its mediation approach can be a beneficial addition to the avenues available to employees who wish to raise safety and health concerns."

The Council has an impressive record 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