



HANFORD
CONCERNS
COUNCIL

PROGRESS REPORT
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A NEW DIRECTION

The Hanford Concerns Council is founded upon an agreement between CH2M HILL and the Government Accountability Project (GAP) to work together in pursuing mutual goals for a safe work environment at Hanford. This agreement arose out of a time of discord and mistrust over safety at the Hanford tank farms, which store over 50 million gallons of radioactive waste generated from the production of Cold War era nuclear weapons.

With the support and encouragement of the Department of Energy's Office of River Protection (DOE-ORP) in 2005, GAP and CH2M HILL codified their commitment to work together by chartering the Hanford Concerns Council, an independent forum for resolving individual employee concerns. The Council operates as a separate nonprofit entity that seeks to improve workplace safety by providing a forum for employees to bring forward concerns that are particularly complex, polarized or difficult to resolve.

This report reflects on the results of collective work and commitment by GAP, CH2M HILL, and DOE-ORP. It describes lessons learned in the process of case resolution, and the Council's work in furthering safety reforms within CH2M HILL and DOE-ORP. •



“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.”

Senator Patty Murray

BLENDING PERSPECTIVES FOR RESOLVING CONCERNS

The Hanford Concerns Council brings together people with diverse perspectives who share a common commitment to “full, fair, and final resolution” of individual employee concerns related to safety, health and the environment. It is comprised of representatives of CH2M HILL, nuclear safety advocacy groups, neutral at-large members and an ex-officio member representing DOE-ORP. This diverse membership and blended perspectives distinguishes this forum from other employee concerns programs.

The Council is modeled after its predecessor, the Hanford Joint Council, which successfully resolved fifty cases during its operation from 1994 to 2003. Many current members of the Hanford Concerns Council first served on the Joint Council. They provide a link to lessons learned that are being applied to solving today’s issues.

The Council has developed a wide range of analytic tools and approaches which are customized for each individual case. By doing so, Council members work together to uncover underlying issues and prompt action on needed changes in practices or policies. Members representing the company, advocates and neutrals work together to review data, interview employees and managers and develop consensus solutions. •



“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 ensure the safe completion of our cleanup mission at Hanford.”

Roy Schepens, Former Manager, DOE Office of River Protection



Signatories to the Hanford Concerns Council Charter: Ed Aromi of CH2M HILL, Roy Schepens of DOE-ORP, and Tom Carpenter of Government Accountability Project.



“The Hanford Concerns Council embodies our efforts to achieve a safe work environment. By focusing on dignity and respect, this forum has affected the lives and perspectives of workers for the better. The benefit to our operations has been immensely valuable.”

Mark Spears,
President and CEO
CH2M HILL
Hanford Group, Inc.

NEUTRALITY AND COLLABORATION

It is not often that a group of people with opposing views can come together to pursue common goals. Before the first Council was formed in 1994, its members were not likely to gather in the same room, except perhaps in a courtroom. Under the Council process, however, members with differing perspectives and expertise contribute to productive conflict resolution and enhanced safety practices. Rather than create dissent, the blended perspectives facilitate deeper understanding of the issues and promote innovative solutions.

The Council's company representatives work issue by issue, sometimes simply to provide answers as part of the resolution process. Often, company representatives are able to initiate changes and implement solutions identified by the Council even before the Council issues its formal consensus recommendation. CH2M HILL's willingness to react in real-time helps restore employee trust and creates a safer workplace. It also helps the company address issues that may be a concern to other employees.

The Council's advocacy members ensure that CH2M HILL and the Council address the stress and emotional pressures that often come wrapped around specific workplace concerns. The advocacy members create a safe setting where all aspects of an individual's situation are examined apart from any negative history or the polarization that can interfere with resolution of concerns at a nuclear site.

Neutral members bring an outside, objective perspective to the process, and the Council's chief staff member serves as a neutral interface between the employee and Council members. Together, they help ensure a balance in the examination and resolution of employee concerns. They also help address concerns in a holistic way. Thus, all the personal, technical, and systems components of an issue are sorted out and reviewed for a more complete solution to the problem.

The DOE-ORP ex-officio member provides support to the Council. Recognizing its potential for contributing to a safety-conscious work environment, DOE-ORP has strongly endorsed and encouraged the Council's efforts. The Council's approach parallels DOE's present human performance initiative which seeks to

- 1) build trust between workers and leaders,
- 2) examine operations and encourage feedback, and
- 3) reward behavior that demonstrates personal accountability for safety.

These principles promote goals for the safe and efficient cleanup of the site, which of all parties to the Council share. •





THE RESOLUTION PROCESS

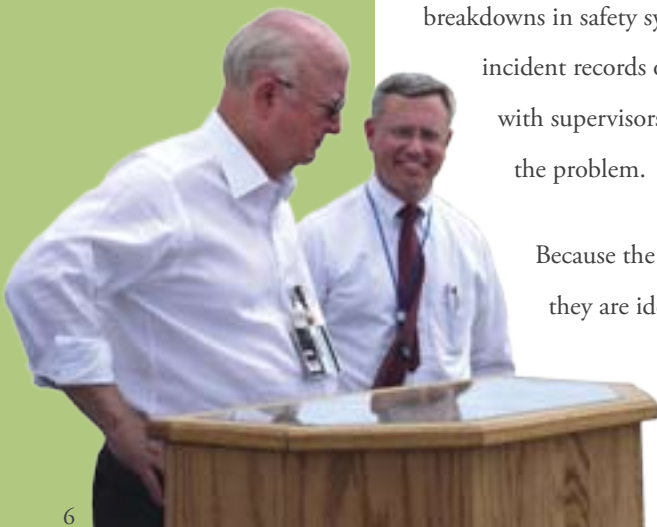
Through a process conducted in a safe and neutral forum, the Hanford Concerns Council offers employees a means to bring closure to their individual concerns. The Council also seeks to address underlying factors an employee believes may cause harm or illness to other workers or may create negative impacts to the environment.



Early in the process, the employee has an opportunity to describe his or her concerns, provide data and information, and ask the Council to look into available information. Once the Council determines it is an appropriate venue for the case, Council members conduct a preliminary assessment, outline a plan and goals for the case, and confirm the plan with the employee. A balanced subcommittee of Council members then obtains needed information to analyze the situation.

The subcommittee identifies the components of the problem, such as breakdowns in safety systems or information transfer, deficiencies in employee incident records or access to medical evaluation, or misunderstandings with supervisors or peers. Then the subcommittee seeks ways to address the problem.

Because the company is willing to address problems as soon as they are identified and verified, employees gain understanding about company operations, a sense of validation, and confidence in the staying power of the final



resolution. The Council operates by consensus and through the Council's charter agreement, CH2M HILL has accepted an obligation to implement consensus resolutions.

This uniquely designed process allows employees to seek complete closure in an independent forum removed from any fear of retaliation or polarization. Resolutions can be attained without emotional trauma and financial expense. The process also allows the company to address problems with a greater focus on the underlying issues than typically can be achieved through more traditional and adversarial means.

As a result, each case brought to the Hanford Concerns Council has been satisfactorily resolved. At the same time, however, employees are not precluded from pursuing other avenues if a solution is not reached, although other processes must be placed on hold while the Council is reviewing the case. The Council's resolution process is provided at no cost to employees.

The Council is not a substitute for resolving concerns internally, and it does not supplant existing employee concerns programs. Rather, the Council is a forum that benefits employees, the company and government regulators by providing an additional, non-adversarial way to resolve particularly complex concerns. Compared to other adversarial means, the Council's process costs less and is more productive in addressing broad goals for a safe work environment. •

“Without an avenue to voice concerns, workers are more likely to turn their discontent into a legal battle. At Hanford, such conflicts sometimes drag on for years, costing taxpayers millions of dollars.”

Tri- City Herald
Editorial July 6, 2005





BENEFICIAL OUTCOMES

Since the Council's inception in July 2005, it has brought about beneficial results for employees and the company, including:

Setting the record straight

In some instances, employees' concerns highlighted the need for improved information gathering and recording in worker injury cases. By providing information identified through the Council's case work into affected workers' files, key needs for benefit eligibility such as creating work histories, or obtaining accurate medical opinions were completed in the case resolution process. By providing results of other Council research, workers have been better able to gain access to benefit programs.

Reducing risk and uncertainty

For employees in these especially complex cases, the Council process helped alleviate stress and uncertainty about their health, safety or job security. By using the Council's deliberate, focused approach, they have been free of the stresses and uncertainties and the financial burdens associated with litigation or highly public or polarized communication over their concern. Employees were able to calmly and privately resolve personal concerns and underlying issues that also may affect the safety of others. Likewise, the company benefited from resolving concerns in a way that minimized cost, led to improved safety, employee relations and work relationships, and contributed to a fair environment.

Sharing perspectives and commitment to safety

Through the Council process, advocacy members gained greater understanding of site operations and challenges as well as the company's decision criteria and policy rationale. Likewise, company members benefited from concerns and insights expressed by advocacy members. All benefited from improved understanding and trust. The interactions strengthened a mutual commitment to work together in achieving a common objective for a safe work environment at Hanford.



Fostering capacity for problem solving

By sponsoring and agreeing to work within this forum, the company gained opportunities for listening and interacting with employees who were unwilling to communicate their concerns within existing internal channels. The company could then verify and address policy or operational concerns before they became polarized, more complex or difficult to resolve. The interactions generated improved and productive problem-solving capabilities that will outlast the case resolution process.

Rewarding personal accountability for safety

As employees brought their concerns to the Council, company representatives were surprised to learn that valued employees had negative experiences that could potentially impact their enthusiasm for their job, their pride in working for the company, or their trust in its values. The increased awareness prompted the company to recognize and honor employees whose values contribute to a safe and efficient work environment. Additionally, the employees were asked to be involved in management efforts for continuous improvement. •

“If someone wants to see a real Integrated Safety Management System (ISMS) culture at work, look to the Hanford Concerns Council. The Council is truly after truth, honesty and integrity which are the frontrunners for any program. The process of getting me where I belonged was slow and difficult; and I cannot give them enough credit for all the help given me during my frustrating times. I will always give the Council my utmost respect and will tell people that, if they are having a problem with the company and want a fair shake, I recommend they go to the Council for a fair resolution. The process was an awesome experience, and I have new friends who really care.”

From an employee who used the Council process





THE COUNCIL'S CONTRIBUTION TO LEARNING AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE

When an employee brings a concern to the Council, members seek to untangle and review all contributing factors. The process can reveal systemic problems in communication, operations, decision criteria, or work policies that have broader potential impacts and merit change. Often, changes are initiated immediately, resolving individual concerns and providing long-term improvements in health and safety for all workers. In the past two years, the Council has affected some significant changes, including:

Improving decision-making through shared perspectives

The Council process provided a window into employees' perspectives about safety concerns in the tank farms and revealed breakdowns in communication or decision-making criteria. The revelations provided valuable input to decision processes and led to several improved practices in safety, technical understanding, and systems for communicating concerns within the chain of command.

Integrating information to improve safety and response

The Council process heightened company awareness of needs for improved medical response to safety and health issues. For example, the case resolution process stimulated changes in the company's collection and sharing of information needed for employees with health concerns or medical emergencies.

Linking workplace events with health effects

As part of its efforts to help employees gain access to existing benefit programs, the Council suggested improvements to CH2M HILL's and DOE-ORP's record-keeping that would facilitate tracking of worker location, exposure levels, and medical histories. Some of these changes, already initiated by the company, make it easier for employees to link work events with possible short- and long-term health effects and to compile documentation needed for benefit programs intended to help injured or ill workers.



Fostering a safety-conscious work environment

The Council process helped minimize negative interactions among peers and supervisors. It helped build trusting relationships that reinforced the company's commitment to individual responsibility for safety. Employees' trust in the Council and its processes ultimately extended to the company representatives and managers, furthering DOE's goals for the human performance initiative, which encourages open examination of operations and feedback. The increased trust, improved problem-solving, and openness have contributed to a safety-conscious work environment and translated directly to on-the-ground results. •



“This is a program that makes a lot of sense and has proved to be effective in the past. Other Hanford contractors should see its worth and join in. CH2M HILL and GAP did the right thing by creating it. Now it needs to grow.”

Tri-City Herald Editorial July 6, 2005

COLLABORATION FOR A SAFE AND EFFICIENT CLEANUP

The Council's mediation-like approach also offers broader benefits to the Hanford cleanup mission and the surrounding community. Outcomes from the council process promote improved health, safety and environmental protection that impact the entire Hanford workforce as well as local communities and businesses.

The Council provides a forum for furthering the DOE-ORP's broader goals for a safety-conscious work environment and efficient clean up of nuclear waste. This process helps avoid litigation costs, diversion of attention and resources from the clean up mission, and negative attention from DOE headquarters, state agencies, and the media. Instead, the Council's work contributes to allowing those responsible for the site—managers and workers alike—to focus resources and attention on underlying systemic problems. As a result, the Council's collective work benefits individual employees, DOE-ORP, Hanford contractors, taxpayers and the community. •



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