

Suitability of Hanford as waste site debated

By Linda Hahn
Of the Emerald

New criteria for choosing sites to be tested for the permanent underground storage of nuclear wastes should be developed by the U.S. Congress, Gordon Goles, a University geology professor, said Friday.

Goles and five other University representatives debated the suitability of Hanford for waste storage with Gail Hunt, a spokesman for the U.S. Depart-

ment of Energy, as part of a symposium. "Hanford: The Nuclear Age in the Northwest."

Hanford was chosen because Congress requested that the energy department look at sites with existing facilities, not because of their geologic suitability, Hunt admitted. The Hanford nuclear reservation, located in southeast Washington, was built during World War II and presently is host to the largest stockpile of nuclear wastes in the world, ac-

ording to pamphlets from the Survival Center, which sponsored the event.

When asked by biology Professor Stan Cook if Hanford would have been considered if the site had not been previously used to store radioactive materials, Hunt said, "No."

Hunt said that five more years of testing at Hanford must be completed to determine site suitability. Testing of the Hanford site in southeast Washington has already cost the

energy department \$300 million since Hanford was chosen last year. The price tag for testing probably will reach \$1 billion before the tests are completed, Hunt said. Two other sites, in Texas and Nevada, also are being tested and probably will cost about \$1 billion each before suitability is determined, Hunt said.

Hunt admitted he would prefer locating a nuclear waste storage site on a hard type of rock, such as granite, instead of

the basalt rock that lies beneath Hanford. Because Hanford is located at a fold in the mantle crust, the site also may be prone to earthquakes.

And Cook said that Hanford's location in a flood plain saturated with groundwater next to the Columbia River also could cause problems. The situation could cause seepage of radioactive material to the air or to groundwater, he said.

"Ideally, one would want to put this stuff where it is arid and things can't be leached," Cook said. "It is a mistake of Congress to commit us there."

Hunt said Hanford is the only site being considered that is below the water table. Two other possible sites also being tested in Nevada and Texas are above the water table, he said.

"Water is the fatal flaw," Hunt said. "For a repository to be selected, we have to demonstrate that the water moves so slowly that it doesn't matter." Again, Hunt said tests presently being done by the energy department at Hanford will determine its suitability.

However, Goles said the testing should be stopped and Congress should be asked to review its decision.

"It seems to me that citizens are being handed a political decision. It is likely there will be a repository on the site. None of the sites is best, and it is possible to find one that is better," Goles said. "We need to put pressure on Congress to review their decision and look at their set of criteria so we don't get caught in this bind again."

But Hunt questioned how good is good enough.

"We can't study the whole world," Hunt said. "Let's find a suitable site, where there won't be releases into the biosphere and determine if it is acceptable."

According to the Nuclear Waste Act Policy of 1982, site suitability must be determined by 1993 and completed by 1998. However, Hunt said the energy department has missed every date on the timetable Congress set up.

"We've been late due to public involvement," Hunt said. "The process is set up with public involvement at all levels. The licensing process precludes a political decision."

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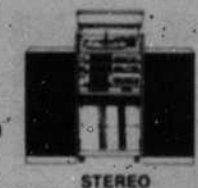


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The public is invited to a discussion tonight at 7:30 on Exalt Measure 5, the measure to remove criminal penalties for the use or growth of marijuana for personal use in Oregon. Event is in Room 101 EMU

"Prospects for Effective Prevention in Health Care" is the topic of a lecture today at 3 p.m. in Gerlinger Lounge.

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