

# Hanford ordered to take more precautions

## Hydrogen buildup may be dangerous

RICHLAND, Wash. (AP) — Energy Secretary James Watkins has ordered additional safety precautions at a Hanford nuclear waste storage tank that has a low possibility of exploding because of hydrogen buildup.

Among the disasters Watkins is seeking to prevent is the chance that workers could be contaminated by radioactive waste oozing up through pipes at the top of the giant storage tank, according to a DOE news release.

Watkins also ordered that core samples be taken to learn the composition of the wastes. Hanford nuclear reservation officials had shut down sampling

and most monitoring activities inside the tank to prevent the accidental sparking of an explosion.

The new orders were released last Thursday after Watkins was briefed on the issue last week. DOE spokeswoman Catherine Kaliniak said Wednesday in Washington, D.C.

The orders do not mean that Watkins was dissatisfied with previously announced safety precautions, she said.

"We don't know enough about the tank and we are continuing to learn," Ms. Kaliniak said, adding that Watkins wanted to try new things "to address what we are discover-

ing."

The one-million-gallon double-walled storage tank, known as 101-SY, is located on the DOE's Hanford reservation in southeastern Washington and operated for the agency by Westinghouse Hanford Co.

Watkins orders were:

- That sampling begin to determine the composition of the wastes, plus their potential chemical reactions and options to eliminate gas buildup.

Westinghouse spokesman Mike Berriochoa said the sampling would likely occur after the next release of gas through the venting system, expected sometime in late July.

- That a safety analysis be per-

formed to determine if a sprinkler system should be inserted into the tank to wet the hard surface of the crust formed at the top of the waste. The sprinkler system would reduce the chances that sodium and ammonium nitrates observed in the tanks could ignite if the hydrogen gas ignites.

Berriochoa said the water would eliminate the chances of an explosion by the nitrates, but could lead to greater problems if it causes the crust to become harder.

- That a technical panel of outside experts be formed to review Hanford's plans to address tank safety issues.

- That operational restrictions be started to reduce the chances that workers would be endangered by radioactive waste and

toxic fumes that could be pushed up through the monitoring and ventilation pipes in the event of an explosion.

- That the DOE's offices of Nuclear Safety and Environment, Safety and Health continue management review of the problem.

Berriochoa said that numerous operational restrictions have been in place since the gas problem was discovered earlier this year.

He also said that analysis has determined that an explosion inside the tank would not be sufficient to rupture it and hurl radioactivity into the sky but could force the waste up through the pipes and onto the surrounding ground.

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## Timber compromise may be continued

MEDFORD (AP) — Sen. Mark Hatfield says Congress may have to extend the Northwest timber compromise by another year if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decides to list the northern spotted owl as a threatened species.

Federal agencies won't be able to get a spotted owl recovery plan ready before the compromise expires at the end of September, the Oregon Republican said during a trip to southern Oregon.

Hatfield said any recovery plan would have to take into account the economic and social consequences of reducing logging levels in the Northwest to preserve old growth forest habitat for the owl.

The decision on whether to list the owl as a threatened species is made on biological grounds only.

Hatfield said in Medford Tuesday he expects to sponsor legislation to set the timber harvest on national forests in Oregon and Washington at 3 billion board feet.

That represents a reduction of 21 percent from the 3.8 billion board feet set by Congress last fall in the Northwest timber compromise. The compromise was enacted to free timber for logging that was tied up in a lawsuit over the spotted owl.

"Some recovery plan is going to drop the cut anyway," Hatfield said. "Any way you look at it, with or without the owl, you're going to see that declining level of allowable cut."

By extending the compromise another year, federal agencies would have time to draft a recovery plan for the spotted owl and put in place the management plans that will guide the national forests for

the next 10 to 15 years, Hatfield said.

Hatfield said he expected the federal agencies involved to draft a recovery plan for the spotted owl without having to resort to the Cabinet-level committee that is provided for under the Endangered Species Act.

"If you think you're going to get any consensus out of that collection, I think that's just impossible," Hatfield said.

In Roseburg Wednesday, Hatfield said he didn't believe the Endangered Species Act could be changed or needs to be changed to consider economic effects of protecting a species, as has been suggested by Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan Jr.

"I think the process does provide for that once the owl or any other creature is determined to be endangered," Hatfield said. "The BLM (U.S. Bureau of Land Management) and the Forest Service are now developing the data base, the economic data base, that gets cranked into this whole process. And the governor's office has done this from the state's perspective. The state of Washington is doing the same thing."

"I don't think the politics, namely the votes to amend or modify ... is feasible at this time just from the politics of the Congress."

Hatfield said the recent report on the spotted owl produced by scientists from federal agencies, which recommended a drastic cut in logging levels to prevent the extinction of the owl, was very credible.

"But the mission of Jack Ward Thomas and his colleagues was singular — to establish a scientific data base," Hatfield said.



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