

Energy Dept.: Slow Leak in Hanford Waste Tank

It is the nation's most contaminated nuclear site, with cleanup expected to last decades

RICHLAND, Wash. (AP) — There is a slow leak in the oldest double-shell waste tank at the Hanford nuclear reservation that's allowing highly radioactive and hazardous waste to leak into the space between the inner and outer shells, the federal Department of Energy said Monday.

No waste is believed to have leaked from the outer shell into the soil beneath the underground tank on the south-central Washington reservation, the agency said.

The Tri-City Herald reports that earlier testing showed that some of the material seen between the two walls of the tank was radioactive waste. Now DOE has confirmed a leak. While the exact amount isn't known, the agency said perhaps a couple table-spoons of additional waste were seen between the two tank walls between Thursday and Sunday.

The tank is one of 28 double-shell containers used to hold waste from older, leak-prone single-shell tanks. They hold 56 million gallons of radioactive waste from the past production of weapons plutonium

until it can be treated for disposal.

The tank is roughly 40 years old and contains about 850,000 gallons of sludge and liquid waste.

Plans call for continued twice-weekly visual inspections using cameras and regular checks of liquid levels inside the primary tank, said Tom Fletcher, assistant manager for the Tank Farms Project.

Fletcher added that his people are "working collaboratively" with the state Ecology Department to determine what to do next and to "ensure that we are effectively protecting the public and the environment."

Routine monitoring has not detected leaks in any of the other double-shell tanks, the Energy Department said. Expanded inspections are planned on six other tanks similar to the one that is leaking.

The federal government created Hanford in the 1940s as part of the top-secret Manhattan Project to build the atomic bomb. Today, it is the nation's most contaminated nuclear site, with cleanup expected to last decades.



Hanford's twin KE and KW nuclear reactors in 2008 with the B Reactor in the distance

Soldier

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have not discussed the evidence in the case, but say Bales has PTSD and suffered a concussive head injury during a prior deployment to Iraq.

The father of two from Lake Tapps, Wash., sat beside one of his civilian lawyers, Emma Scanlan, in green fatigues as an investigating officer read the charges against Bales and

informed him of his rights. Bales said, "Sir, yes, sir," when asked if he understood them.

Morse said Bales seemed utterly normal in the hours before the March 11 killings. With his colleagues, Bales watched the movie "Man on Fire," a fictional account of a former CIA operative on a revenge rampage.

Just before he left the base, Morse said, Bales told a Special Forces soldier that he was unhappy with his family life, and that the troops should have been quicker to retaliate for a roadside bomb attack that claimed one soldier's leg.

"At all times he had a clear understanding of what he was doing and what he had done," said Morse, who described Bales as lucid, coherent and responsive.

Bales is accused of slipping away from the remote outpost with an M-4 rifle outfitted with a grenade launcher to attack the villages of Balandi and Alkozai, in a dangerous district.

American officials have said they believe Bales broke the slaughter into two episodes — walking first to one village, returning to the base and slipping away again to carry out the second attack.

The prosecutor said Bales returned to the base at one point, telling a colleague about shooting people at a village. The soldier apparently took it as a bad joke and responded: "Quit messing around."

Prosecutors played for the first time a video captured by a surveillance blimp that showed a caped figure running toward the base, then stopping and dropping his weapons as he's confronted. There is no audio. Morse said Bales was the caped

figure.

After being taken into custody, Morse said, Bales said: "I thought I was doing the right thing."

The hearing is scheduled to run as long as two weeks, and part of it will be held overnight to allow video testimony from witnesses, including an estimated 10 to 15 Afghans, in Afghanistan.

Bales' attorney, John Henry Browne, said the hearing will give the defense a chance to see what the government can prove. They are expecting a court martial.

Bales is an Ohio native who joined the Army in late 2001 — after the 9/11 attacks — as his career as a stockbroker imploded. An arbitrator entered a \$1.5 million fraud judgment against him and his former company that went unpaid, and his attempt to start an investment firm in Florida also failed.

He was serving his fourth combat tour after three

stints in Iraq, and his arrest prompted a national discussion about the stresses posed by multiple deployments.

Scanlan, his attorney, declined to say to what extent the lawyers hope to elicit testimony that could be used to support a mental-health defense. Bales himself will not make any statements because his lawyers said he would have nothing to gain.

Bales' wife, Karilyn, who plans to attend the hearing, had complained about financial problems on her blog in the year before the killings, and noted Bales was disappointed at being passed over for a promotion.

Browne described those stresses as garden-variety — nothing that would prompt such a massacre — and has also said, without elaborating, that Bales suffered a traumatic incident during his second Iraq tour that triggered "tremendous depression."

Bales remembers little or nothing from the time of the attacks, the defense said.

Scanlan, who deferred an opportunity to give an opening statement, said the Army had only recently turned over a preliminary DNA trace evidence report from the crime scenes, but defense experts have not had time to review it.

Bales, who spent months in confinement at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., before being transferred to Lewis-McChord last month, is doing well, Scanlan said.

"He's getting prepared," she said, "but it's nerve-racking for anybody."

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