

Top Stories

What could be the nation's largest solar project proposed by feds at Eastern WA nuclear site

By Annette Cary July 25, 2024

The Department of Energy is entering negotiations for one of the largest in the nation, if not the largest, solar and battery storage energy projects to be built at the Hanford site in Eastern Washington. It announced Thursday that it had picked Hecate Energy based in Chicago, Ill., for a gigawatt-scale project on up to 8,000 acres of unused nuclear reservation land near the southeast edge of the Hanford site.

By way of comparison, the Columbia Generating Station nuclear plant on leased Hanford land generates about 1.2 gigawatts of electricity, or 10% of the electricity used in the state of Washington. It is baseload power that can be produced continuously. The solar project could be operating in five to seven years. It would be the largest project in DOE's recently announced Cleanup to Clean Energy initiative that repurposes parts of DOE-owned land, including land like that at Hanford previously used in the nation's nuclear weapons program, for clean energy projects.

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What's being done now about radioactive water that threatens the Columbia River in WA?

By Annette Cary July 9, 2024

A major radioactive contamination threat to the Columbia River should be removed at the Hanford nuclear site before the end of summer. Hanford workers have started to pump contaminated water from the final basin of the nuclear reservation's nine reactors along the Columbia River.

"This effort will eliminate the risk of a leak of contaminated water to the groundwater about a quarter-mile from the Columbia River," said Andy Wiborg, the Department of Energy acting deputy assistant manager for river and plateau cleanup. "Getting the contaminated water out of this basin is a key step in our risk-reduction mission," he said. The Hanford nuclear reservation adjacent to Richland in Eastern Washington was used to produce about two-thirds of the plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons program from World War II through the Cold War.

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Important Moment reached for Eastern Wa's leak-prone Hanford radioactive waste tanks

By Annette Cary July 2, 2024

Hanford site workers have reached a key environmental cleanup milestone, emptying radioactive waste from a second tank farm. "This is an important moment in our Hanford cleanup effort," said Brian Vance, the Department of Energy manager for the 580-square-mile Hanford nuclear reservation.

The Department of Energy announced Tuesday that it had emptied waste from all tanks in the AX Tank Farm, a group of four underground tanks. With the most recent of the tanks emptied, DOE now has 21 of 149 single-shell tank waste retrievals completed. The single-shell tanks are prone to leaking radioactive and hazardous chemical waste into the ground in the center of the Hanford nuclear reservation in Eastern Washington.

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Technical troubles delay new tests at huge Eastern WA radioactive waste melter

By Annette Cary June 21, 2024

The Department of Energy is unlikely to meet a deadline set by a federal court for the next step to prepare the Hanford site's vitrification plant to treat radioactive waste for disposal. On Thursday DOE notified the Washington state Department of Ecology that it was at risk of not meeting the Aug. 1 deadline to start cold commissioning of the plant, a test of vitrification using nonradioactive chemicals to simulate waste before radioactive waste is introduced into the plant.

DOE is asking the Department of Ecology to agree to a four-month extension to Nov. 29 of this year. "The process for commissioning this first-in-kind facility is comprehensive and dynamic," said DOE Hanford Manager Brian Vance in a message to Hanford employees Thursday.

He said the delay was caused by "relatively minor equipment issues" that DOE wants to fix before introducing chemicals to simulate radioactive waste into the vitrification plant's Low Activity Waste Facility. DOE remains committed to starting treating radioactive waste by the federal court consent decree deadline of August 2025, Vance said, despite the shortened time proposed between the start of cold commissioning and introducing radioactive waste into the plant for hot commissioning.

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Leadership Changes Among Primes





Leadership changes in works for Hanford contractors

By TCAJOB, July 15, 2024

John Eschenberg, president of Central Plateau Cleanup Company, or CPCCo, a prime Hanford contractor, announced that he'll depart at the end of July.

And the president of another prime contractor, Hanford Mission Integration Solutions, or HMIS, has been tapped to take his place. Bob Wilkinson was set to come on board July 8, with the full leadership transition expected to be wrapped up by the end of the month.

"Bob's 32 years of Hanford experience include advancing key mission objectives, deep experience as a leader on multiple contracts, and notable successes engaging labor organizations and stakeholders," Eschenberg said in a statement. "I have every confidence that Bob's extensive experience and leadership will guide CPCCo to continued success."

Wilkinson said he was excited about the new role and proud of the work HMIS has done.

"This team is delivering on enabling and executing the mission and demonstrates its enormous capabilities every day," he said in a statement. "I struggle with words to describe how impressed I am with this team and know that you will continue to be impressive, and I look forward to watching HMIS demonstrate that each day."

A familiar face at HMIS is stepping into Wilkinson's shoes. Amy Basche, who's been the chief operations officer during the contractor's entire tenure, is taking over as president.

"Amy has more than 30 years of experience at Hanford and has held several executive positions for numerous years. She has a vast amount of knowledge and experience in all phases of Hanford activities," Wilkinson said in his statement.

Meanwhile, Todd Synoground, vice president of infrastructure and site services for HMIS, is stepping up as the acting chief operations officer.

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Public Comment Periods

Hanford Proposed changes to the Tri-Party Agreement and consent decree on Hanford Site tank waste

May 30, 2024 - September 1st, 2024

The U.S. Department of Energy (USDOE), Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology), and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have signed a settlement agreement and are proposing new and revised cleanup deadlines in the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) and Washington v. Energy consent decree.

This followed mediated negotiations that began in 2020, also known as Holistic Negotiations.

The agencies are holding a 90-day public comment period on the proposed changes to the Tri-Party Agreement and consent decree.

Highlights of proposed changes

- Maintaining existing time frames for starting treatment of both low-activity and high-level waste by immobilizing it in glass via vitrification.
- Using a direct-feed approach for immobilizing high-level waste in glass, similar to the Direct-Feed Low-Activity Waste Program.
- Building a waste transfer vault and second effluent management facility to support treating high-level waste.
- Retrieving waste from 22 tanks in Hanford's 200 West Area by 2040, including grouting the low-activity portion of the waste for offsite disposal.
- Designing and constructing 1-million gallons of multi-purpose storage capacity to support tank waste retrievals.
- Evaluating and developing new technologies for retrieving waste from tanks.

Proposed Changes to TPA & Consent Decree Comment Period

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