La Grande Transcripts (TLG)

Public Hearing May 12, 2003 – La Grande, Oregon

DOE meetings/hearings to acquire comments on the Revised Draft Hanford Solid (Radioactive and Hazardous) Waste Management Program Environmental Impact Statement were conducted in a combination of forums to allow full participation of the audience and commenters. The overall forum consisted of periods for introductions, presentations, informal question and answer sections, panel discussions, and formal comment periods. The identification of comments from the transcripts of these meetings required close reading and interpretation. The results are shown in the identification of formal comment speakers, numbering of comments related to the revised HSW EIS, and bar-coding of copies of the transcripts contained in Volume IV of the HSW EIS. Information in the transcripts related to those informal portions of the meetings are not numbered or bar-coded and do not constitute formal comments. Formal responses to this information were not prepared.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

REVISED DRAFT HANFORD SITE SOLID
(RADIOACTIVE AND HAZARDOUS)
WASTE PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
(HSW EIS)

PUBLIC MEETING

MAY 12, 2003
7:00 P.M.
BEST WESTERN
1711 21ST STREET
LA GRANDE, OREGON

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Introductions

MS. SHELLEY CIMON: Well, I want to take a moment to welcome everyone here. I appreciate your coming out on a Monday night.

My name is Shelley Cimon, and I live here in La Grande. And I chair the Oregon Hanford Waste Board, which is a Governor-appointed state board that is focused on protection of Oregonians in relation to the cleanup of Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

So we focus on protection of the Columbia River, the air that comes into Oregon from the Hanford site and also transportative nuclear waste through our state.

We're here tonight to take a look at, hear about, and hopefully comment on the Revised Draft Hanford Site Solid Waste Environmental Impact Statement, which includes radioactive and hazardous waste -- so mixed waste.

(Ms. Cimon made formal introductions of various people).

MR. DEE WILLIS: Thanks, Shelley. I'm glad to be here tonight. And thank you for coming. Thank you very much for taking time out of your lives to be here and talk to the

Introductions (contd)

government.

My job is to make sure you have an opportunity to say what you have to say tonight. That's my job.

As Shelley said, this is the third of six public meetings on the Department of Energy's revised Hanford Solid Waste Environmental Impact Statement. And it's a revised statement because of work you did last year talking to the Department of Energy.

These public meetings, the public meetings we had last year, and some of you were here last year, are living proof of the fact that you can affect what government does.

This is a Revised Draft based on the comments you gave them on the initial draft of this Environmental Impact Statement last year.

The main purpose of this meeting is to get your comments on the Revised Draft. We'll do some other things, but the main purpose is to get your comments.

The comments we get from you tonight, along with responses from DOE, will be addressed as part of the final Environmental Impact Statement that comes out later.

Introductions (contd)

There's several ways to offer comments on this Revised Draft: One, is to talk tonight; second, is written, there's some written forms back there where you can just fill in your name and address and say what you have to say.

Give those forms to Yvonne Sherman back there in the corner, if you want to write, if you're an introvert and don't like public speaking.

There is a fact sheet, I usually bring it out with me but I forgot. Would somebody raise -- thank you, ma'am. That's the fact sheet right there, it's in the back.

It has all the addresses, e-mail addresses, DOE street address, that you might need to communicate with DOE about this.

We're going to record your comments tonight verbatim, using a court reporter. We're also going to record your comments audio, using all this equipment over here.

So when you talk, we're going to ask you to use a mike. Even though it's a small room, everybody can hear us, we're going to ask you to use the mike so we can record you. And

Introductions (contd)

I'll ask you to give us your name as well.

There's a lot of relevant information on the back, on the back counter back there. Help yourselves when you have a chance.

You're going to get a postcard later from DOE asking you how much more information you want.

Agenda. After I talk, there's going to be a short DOE presentation given by Mike. After that, Dennis Faulk is going to give us the Environmental Protection Agency's comments on this Revised Draft of the EIS.

After that, Heart of America, Gerry Pollet, is going to give you his perspectives on the EIS. And then after that, you're going to get a chance to give us public comments.

I found through experience that the best way to deal with comments -- let me back up a minute. I have found through experience that what you come to these meetings for is to listen and talk, to have a discussion with the DOE people and the other people participating. We're going to get to that.

First, DOE wants to hear some

Introductions (contd); Presentations

comments, some formal comments. They find those useful. We're going to do a few of those, and then go to open, more informal discussion where you can find out what you want to know.

Then we'll go back to formal comment. We'll get it all done. Any questions before I turn it over to Mike Collins, DOE? Okay, thanks.

(Mr. Collins gave a presentation on behalf of the Department of Energy, followed by a presentation by Dennis Faulk on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency.)

MR. DEE WILLIS: Thanks, Dennis. Now we're going to hear from Gerry Pollet briefly. And then after that we're going to take comments directly from you.

MR. GERRY POLLET: Thank you all. (Slide presentation). Heart of America Northwest, for those of you who don't know, is a region-wide citizens group. We're a quality of life organization -- work on economic and quality of life issues.

Presentations (contd)

And that biggest issue affecting the quality of life that we focus on is the cleanup of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, which is not only America's but the western hemisphere's most contaminated site.

The Columbia River is being contaminated. And the reason we're here tonight is that the Department of Energy wants to double the amount of nuclear waste at Hanford.

Kind of in a nutshell, what is this about? The Department of Energy is talking about doubling the waste at Hanford.

And another quick overview of the types of radioactive wastes we're talking about, there are four major types of radioactive waste at Hanford.

Transuranic waste is plutonium-bearing waste. And this is the focus of a lot of controversy about trucks coming right through this community.

High-level waste, liquid high-level waste, and spent nuclear fuel rods, low-level waste is anything that isn't the other two. And it can be as radioactive or more so than

Presentations (contd)

the other two. And mixed low-level waste is mixed with hazardous wastes. Okay.

Now, we're talking about massive amount of import of radioactive waste from the rest to the weapons complex through the year 2046.

Hanford is supposed to be cleaned up by the year 2018. All of its soil is supposed to be cleaned up by 2018. Hanford is the most contaminated site in America.

So the other USDOE sites are supposed to be cleaned up years before 2018. So it is not about helping clean up the other sites that would be using Hanford as a national radioactive waste dump, it is about new generation of wastes as well.

And here's where it comes home: We are talking at minimum in their upper-bound volume, 70,000 truckloads of radioactive waste coming through Oregon. 70,000. That is about five a day, through 2046.

Now, are they dangerous? Even if the transuranic waste shipments have no accidents, they give off extremely high levels of radiation.

Presentations (contd)

And if you're stuck in traffic next to one or one parks during a snow emergency near you and you're a meter away for an hour, you get the equivalent of a full body x-ray.

Now, without a single accident, these shipments of transuranic wastes will cause fatal cancers in people exposed to them.

As they cross the country to Hanford, before they are stored here, DOE says just temporarily, maybe 20 years, maybe 30, temporarily.

And if it ever leaves, it will truck again to a site in New Mexico. So we're talking about doubling the amount of transportation of these wastes.

In a 1997 study, USDOE said there would be approximately four fatal cancers caused from exposure to these shipments without a single accident being calculated.

And without something else being calculated, that we're going to talk about tonight, which is -- this new EIS does not actually consider anything specific to transportation along I-84, or I-5 on the other side of the state, to Hanford.

Presentations (contd)

Instead, this document claims to say we're showing Washington and Oregon specific transportation impacts. It doesn't.

All they did is they took a national study, extrapolated the number of miles to Oregon, passed it in and made it very incomprehensible for you to read.

In fact, there's nothing in the analysis about what the real risk of an accident is on this road, say, from mid-October through mid-April.

Secondly, there's nothing in here about the actual state of I-84 and I-5 in the state of Oregon.

Now, earlier this year -- let's talk about how hot some of this is. There are two types of transuranic waste. One type is called contact handled, as you see here (indicating).

And the other which they're trying to import right now is called remote-handled transuranic waste with radiation levels hotter than spent nuclear fuel and more than -- at the surface of the cast, 20 chest or full body x-rays in an hour.

And this waste will be shipped on

Presentations (contd)

these routes, according to the EIS. I-84 as you see and up to Hanford. I-5 from California up the Gorge to Hanford.

DOE asserts that it will keep these shipments on interstate highways. The state of Oregon, Department of Transportation has just issued a study identifying 221 critical problem bridges in the state on I-5 and I-84.

What is the impact of that for these transuranic waste shipments? ODOT has concluded that bridges are cracked, restricted in terms of weight.

And here is the ODOT map of -- this little star shows all the bridges that are restricted. The overweight shipments, for instance, of remote-handled transuranic waste would have to leave the interstate highway for up to 120 miles in detours through our communities, on secondary roads going directly past schools, directly past churches, five a day, through downtowns, or they would have to go through downtown Spokane on Interstate 90, which has never been considered either.

Now, you can see for yourself how many bridges we're talking about, and we're

Presentations (contd)

1 talking about right here (indicating). And you
2 will not find analysis in this EIS of I-84
3 winter conditions or the Gorge winter
4 conditions or the Sisku Mountains winter
5 conditions.
6 You will not find any analysis of
7 what the real impacts may be on children
8 exposed along the routes. All the data they
9 use are unfortunately modeled only for latent
10 cancer fatalities in adults. Children are five
11 to ten times more susceptible to getting a
12 cancer from the same radiation dose than an
13 adult is.
14 Now, as I said, without waiting for
15 this EIS, USDOE illegally started to ship waste
16 from two sites, one in Ohio and one in
17 California in December, December 20th. In
18 other words, not exactly waiting for the best
19 weather.
20 And as you can see here from Ken
21 Niles, who is here today, based on the permits
22 granted, the truck shipments from -- is the
23 site in California, this one, Ohio, were
24 directed to use secondary roads and detour off
25 the interstate highway through our communities.

Presentations (contd)

There's no consideration of the potential impacts of this in any USDOE study ever.

MR. DEE WILLIS: Please finish up.

MR. GERRY POLLET: Okay. Neither the USDOE nor the contractor fully considered the overweight status of the truck shipments and the routes that would be used.

We're talking about additional detours that may be necessary, and for bridge construction, not just due to the weight restrictions.

We're talking about as many as 1,800 detoured trucks, damage to the streets, impacting local commerce. You don't want to be stuck in traffic alongside of these and you don't want one safe harboring in a winter storm near anyone.

The detours could be 1- to 200-miles long. Parking could be restricted, school buses could be rerouted, and DOE has never considered this.

And the last time the Washington State Patrol tabulated the inspection results

Presentations (contd)

at the state border for the commercial low-level radioactive waste haulers going to the Hanford site, it found for the same company that DOE is now contracting with, Tri-state Motor Transit, that at the state border, 55 out of 314 of their trucks had safety problems so egregious that they were arrested and held at the state border for safety defects, in that year. That's the same contractor.

Those site-specific, routes-specific impacts have never been considered here. It is our community, our families that are at risk. And it is vital that we do something about it.

Now, citizen groups in the state of Washington sued to stop these shipments. And I'm proud to say that as of this afternoon, Judge Allen McDonald, the federal district court in Eastern Washington, has issued an injunction against the shipments of the transuranic waste.

DOE is clearly intent, though, to try to rush ahead with this inadequate analysis that doesn't look at the real impacts to try to then say "Now we've considered it."

And it's up to you to make sure that

on August 1st, the injunction isn't lifted, by demanding that they look at the real impacts on our health, the risk of an accident, and the risk of fatal cancers even without accidents. The risks of accidents are incredibly significant as well.

The current EIS shows that there will be 25 accidents from these shipments of waste through Oregon and Washington.

It erroneously and falsely portrays that there will be no fatal cancers from the shipments of waste due to accidents because it takes the probability of an accident, not done on site-specific conditions, and multiplies it by the number of fatalities.

You are owed an answer to how many fatalities the worst possible accident would cause, not some figure multiplied by probabilities trying to make it look minusculely small. Thank you.

MR. DEE WILLIS: Thank you, Gerry.

This is what I would like to do: There are ten of you signed up to give formal comment for the record. I'd like to invite

Informal Question and Answer Section (contd)

maybe half of you to come up and give comment now and stop that comment in a more formal kind of communication.

Bring the speakers up. And a couple of more people, perhaps, and have you ask them questions, get more information from them. And then go back into a more formal comment period.

The way I want to start off the comment is I'm going to invite you to come up and speak in two ways: First, those of you who have pressing obligations at home, you come first. I leave you on your honor to identify yourselves.

After that, I'm going to invite you in the order that you signed up to give comment. Okay.

When you come up to give comment, please speak into this mike, this mike here (indicating). Give us your name. Try to speak no longer than five minutes. If you need more than that, take it, but I think five minutes is probably enough for most.

We're going to stay here as long as we have to to take all of your comments. Please, and this is for my Portland and Seattle