TSE-0034; Panel Discussion (contd)

Yes, Ma'am. And speak to the mike and give us your name.

TSE-0034 MS. MARY ELLEN SMITH: My name is Mary Ellen Smith.

I don't know a whole lot about this whole issue, but as I sit here and listen, it seems to me that with all the scientists we

1 have, we ought to be able to figure out a way to keep the groundwater from becoming more contaminated. That doesn't seem to me like that's rocket science.

And it seems to me that it's something that we as members of this state and we as members of the universe have a responsibility to do, we have a responsibility to our grandchildren and our great grandchildren, and all the generations that come after us.

So why can't you guys figure it out?

MR. GERRY POLLET: I will take that as a comment as well as a question.

MR. DEE WILLIS: That is a comment. Does anybody have a response to that?

MR. MICHAEL COLLINS: Well, we have started some groundwater remediation

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activities. We do have some what are called pump and treats where we actually take groundwater from a well, treat it.

We have what's called a vaper extraction technology where essentially a giant vacuum sucks up solvents that are in the ground. That way, so far we have sucked up 77,000 I think it is pounds of carbon tetrachloride. We have taken about four million tons of soil from along the river that's been contaminated out to prevent it from getting into the groundwater. So some activities have started.

MR. DEE WILLIS: Panel? Anybody else?

MR. GERRY POLLET: The question of not contaminating more is a fundamental political choice. So we have very minor scale pump and treat under way, no commitment to do full scale remediation.

The Department of Energy just took comments on a groundwater strategy document that had no strategy for cleanup. No time line for cleanup of groundwater, no strategy for cleanup of groundwater.

But look at the unlined burial grounds. If you don't want to contaminate the groundwater, you have to stop putting things in the soil. And you have to have a strategy that says, if we are going to exceed groundwater standards by building a new burial ground, then we can't do it.

And these people at the Department of Energy have made the decision to already have the burial grounds, and therefore they have called it, as you saw on the slide I showed earlier, an irreversible and irretrievable commitment of the groundwater resource, and then they find that acceptable.

MR. MICHAEL COLLINS: Just a follow-up to that. A large part of that irretrievable and irreversible impact is because of the contamination that's already in the groundwater. It's that 440 billion gallons of low-level radioactive waste that was put in in the past.

MR. DEE WILLIS: Matt or Tom, anything?

MR. MATT McCORMICK: One comment. We do have a groundwater management

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plan, as Gerry was talking about. And it really is a five prong approach that is being implemented in terms of reducing the source term that could harm the groundwater by remediating the high risk waste sites that are in the central plateau, shrinking the contaminated areas to the central plateau, as a priority, and then another major part of it is reducing the recharge of potential water into the vadose zone and driving contaminants that are already there into the groundwater, and that is decommissioning over 500 wells in the next four years. And then capping and isolating unused or damaged fresh water lines in the central plateau. In addition to upgrading the monitoring system of the groundwater in the next two years by installing about 60 wells by the end of '04.

MR. DEE WILLIS: Matt, what is the vadose zone?

MR. MATT McCORMICK: What is that?

MR. DEE WILLIS: What is the vadose zone?

MR. MATT McCORMICK: The

vadose zone is the area between the surface and the groundwater.

MR. GERRY POLLET: How many groundwater wells will you put in around the low-level burial grounds this year and next year?

Ecology's Notice of Deficiency said minimum number required will be 120.

MR. MATT McCORMICK: I don't have the exact number.

MR. GERRY POLLET: I think it's, between now and 2005, you have like 14. But I could be wrong.

MR. MICHAEL COLLINS: I don't know.

MR. DEE WILLIS: Let's keep moving here. Let's take another question, somebody who hasn't spoken yet.

MS. CLARE GILBERT: Clare Gilbert. I have a question about the ILAW, which is -- Well, I will let Michael Collins explain.

MR. MICHAEL COLLINS: The immobilized low-activity waste. The plans for the tank farm waste, the 53 million gallons in

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the 177 tanks is to split it into two fractions. One is a fraction that contains the vast majority of the high-level waste, or the radioactivity --

MR. DEE WILLIS: Define high-level.

MR. MICHAEL COLLINS: Oh. That's what I'm trying to do. Sorry.

They plan on having a smaller volume with most of the radionuclides in it, and then they have a larger volume with the minority of the radionuclides. The high number load of radionuclides is the low-activity waste, or will be the low-activity waste when the vitrification plant is done.

MS. CLARE GILBERT: So is it my understanding that originally the plan was to vitrify all of this ILAW? Does the revised Solid Waste EIS consider what's going to be buried, the ILAW that's going to be buried in vitrified form, or does it consider it using the alternative technologies?

MR. MICHAEL COLLINS: This Environmental Impact Statement assumes that it is vitrified. There is a Tank Farm Closure

Environmental Impact Statement that will probably be out for public comment in September that will be looking at the alternative technologies.

MR. CLARE GILBERT: Okay. So my question for the Panel is, since it is being, since the EIS doesn't address the ILAW in the form that it's probably going to be in the burial grounds, which is grout or other alternative technologies, what kind of impacts will that have, cumulative impacts that haven't been addressed in the EIS?

MR. MICHAEL COLLINS: I guest I don't, Gerry will respond here in a minute, I don't know if we can assume right now that we would go to an alternative technology.

I know they are going to be looking at them, though.

MR. GERRY POLLET: The Assistant Secretary of Energy has already signed a plan that calls for 75 to 85 percent of your high-level waste tank waste not to be vitrified. She signed it already. It's in your Hanford performance management plan, approved by -- it's stamped approved by the

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Assistant Secretary of Energy, Jessie Roberson, August, 2002.

And I can cite it because it happens to be an exhibit in our lawsuit.

And DOE's decided not to vitrify the waste.

Vitrification we know has magnitudes of benefit in terms of protecting the groundwater from contamination. And yet even with vitrified waste in these shallow land disposal for 85 percent of it, what you've got in this model, in this EIS, is at a thousand years you have a huge spike in radioactivity in the groundwater, and for instance, the Native American radiation dose I believe is, under the scenarios, is 900 millirem a year.

Five millirem a year exceeds our state hazardous waste cleanup standard. 900 causes 900 -- I mean, it's about 200 fatal cancers per 10,000 people exposed. So, it's unacceptable. And yet if you switch from glass, we know that the risk to the groundwater and people using the groundwater will go up by more than one magnitude.

MR. DEE WILLIS: Panel?

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MR. THOMAS CARPENTER: Well, the whole ILAW argument, it opens up another kind of door of outrage here, which is that the waste in these tanks is high-level waste, and needs to be considered as such, and dealt with under the law, which is the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. And it says in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act that this most dangerous of all waste ever created by humans needs to be isolated from the environment for 10,000 years, in a vitrified form, in deep geological repository.

In fact the Tri-Party Agreement called for exactly that to happen.

However, last year the Bush administration announced that that was going to be too extensive, and too hard, let's rename this waste something else so we can evade the law. So there are lawsuits flying around within RDC, National Resource Defense Council, and others, the Tribes, and some of the States weighing in to say you can't do that.

But what it looks to me like is that the Department of Energy is gearing up to bury high-level nuclear waste in the soils at the

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Hanford Site, probably in concrete, because that's the cheapest form, and this EIS doesn't analyze it.

It is just more partitioning that's going on of the impacts, more just convenience on the part of the government to not deal with the true magnitude of the problem at the Hanford Site.

And there's just so much going on in our society right now, and this is just one of them, and I think we ought to be dealing with it.

MR. DEE WILLIS: Mike or Matt?

Okay. Next person who hasn't spoken yet. All right. We will go to this gentleman here.

MR. MARTIN FLECK: I am Martin Fleck. Actually, my question might be for the facilitator. I am not sure. It is a process question. So I will sort of stand over here.

So, it seemed to me from the outset that the citizens outnumbered the representatives here from, you know, of the organization that's calling this hearing, which is the Department of Energy, and I'm surprised

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to find, I must have missed the introduction. Did I miss an introduction of our Department of Energy person here earlier in the meeting?

MR. DEE WILLIS: I did introduce him, but not earlier in the meeting. Just a few minutes ago.

MR. MARTIN FLECK: That's what I don't understand. I mean, we so vastly outnumber the representatives of the Department of Energy.

For future instances, it is like a feedback thing, in the future, I would ask you to at least identify all the Department of Energy representatives who are present, since we are directing our comments to the Department of Energy.

I mean, you know, if the Secretary of Energy were here, that's a person way up higher on the food chain, we'd like to know that person is present.

So, Matt, what's your last name?

MR. MATT McCORMICK: Matt McCormick.

MR. MARTIN FLECK: Yeah. Not that Mike was doing any kind of inadequate job,

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I realize that, but if we had known, so I would direct Dane's question to you, which is, --

MR. DEE WILLIS: You are absolutely right. I apologize for not introducing Matt at the top of the program tonight. And I will do that in the future.

MR. MARTIN FLECK: Yeah. Thank you. I mean, ou know, this is a public hearing. We are here representing the public to speak to the representatives of the DOE. I think we ought to know who are the representatives of the DOE present. That's all.

So, Matt, do you believe that you are doing this for the good of the country?

MR. MATT McCORMICK: Yes.

MR. MARTIN FLECK: Can you explain that? How can this be for the good of the country?

MR. MATT McCORMICK: Well, I'm here, and I have been in this job for two months, to accelerate cleanup and closure of the Hanford Site. And I believe in that personally, and commit my professional life to that. And have been doing that previously at

Rocky Flats and then here.

It's important work to me to reduce the threat of Hanford to the environment, to the worker, and to the public. And that's what we're doing.

MR. RALPH BRADSHAW: How do you define cleanup, per the Tri-Party Agreement? Because that doesn't include concrete.

MR. MATT McCORMICK: Cleanup to me is completing the cleanup in accordance with the regulations.

MR. RALPH BRADSHAW: What does that mean in regard to the context of the agreement?

MR. MATT McCORMICK: In accordance with the Tri-Party Agreement that implements and integrates the Resource Conservation Act, and CERCLA Act, which I can't spell out that acronym.

MR. RALPH BRADSHAW: I am sorry. I'm Ralph.

MR. DEE WILLIS: Who's next?

MR. JOHN PERREAULT: John Perreault. And this is a question for Matt or

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for Michael. And I realize you haven't be here that long so you might not be able to answer.

But how is the decision made to place those groundwater wells that are a kilometer or is it a mile off the end, and not put them directly on the end?

MR. MICHAEL COLLINS: It's two different issues. We did the analysis of one kilometer, because the sites, the waste sites are so spread out, we wanted a way to compare them, and our decision was to do that at a kilometer away so we could compare the differences.

They were never meant to be a spot to determine compliance.

The way we have determined where compliance wells go is it is a negotiation between DOE, EPA and the state of Washington, and it is part of the Tri-Party Agreement negotiations.

MR. TOM PERREAULT: So is there not then a rule now that I have heard several times mentioned that the compliance wells do need to be there now, or is that rule something that is being negotiated currently?

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MR. MICHAEL COLLINS: I'm not involved in the negotiations, but I believe they are being negotiated right now.

MR. GERRY POLLET: He's referring to, if you build new burial grounds, where do you have to measure the contamination in the groundwater from them?

And Washington Administrative Code, Chapter 173-303-665 and other portions of 303, specify that you have to have your groundwater monitoring compliant wells at the edge of the facility and you have to attempt to meet the drinking water standard and other standards at the edge of the dumpsite boundary, not a kilometer away.

MR. MICHAEL COLLINS: I'm not disagreeing with you, by the way.

MR. GERRY POLLET: And what we've got here is a model that shows a kilometer away, not from the individual landfill even, but from the composite.

So it might be several kilometers away from where you might have the greatest impact, and it's not where you have the greatest cumulative impact as I shared earlier.

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So what you don't know here is if you build the landfill here and you build it in this fashion at this site and you dump all these different types of wastes together in one landfill with just one type of liner, will that exceed the drinking water standards at the edge of the facility, and are there alternatives that you could build new ones where you don't exceed drinking water standards at the edge of the facility?

You will never know. You will never know under this schematic, unless we force them to withdraw the EIS and resubmit it after they do that analysis, landfill by landfill.

MR. DEE WILLIS: Be succinct. Any more on that question? Okay.

TSE-0035 DR. JIM TROMHOLD: Dr. Jim Tromhold. This is directed to the agency, I am sorry, I didn't get the new name. But you mentioned the name accelerated, and you are committed to acceleration, and no question of your integrity or motivation. This is not a question just to you. It is the whole concept of acceleration.

We are a society that, I mean, the