

## **Safety Concerns Remain at Hanford Nuclear Waste Plant**

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USA Today ran an article Wednesday concerning the ongoing safety problems at the nuclear waste treatment facility in Hanford, Washington. Much of the article focused on unsolved technical difficulties with "pulse jet mixers," devices used to keep the nuclear waste moving to prevent clogging. We [have written about this facility](#) before due to multiple incidences of alleged whistleblower retaliation that have occurred at the \$12 billion vitrification plant. For today, here is a sampling of quotes from the USA Today article which may help to convey the enormity of the problem:

"No one can stand up and say with any certainty that [the pulse jet mixers] will work."

- Walter Tamosaitis, who spent seven years as a supervising engineer on the project.

"[The mixing system] is not necessarily a solid design. ... The research isn't done, the design isn't done, and there are numerous technical and safety issues ... to address. ... [When safety issues are raised,] the first question that gets asked is not 'how are we going to solve it?' It's 'how much is it going to cost?' ... I've never seen this sort of flagrant disregard for technical issues."

- Donna Busche, manager for environmental and nuclear safety at the site.

"We're continuing with a failed design. ... There's a lot of pressure ... from Congress, from the state, from the community to make progress. ... [As a result,] the design processes are cut short, the safety analyses are cut short, and the oversight is cut short. ... We have to stop now and figure out how to do this right, before we move any further."

- Donald Alexander, a senior U.S. government scientist on the project.

"Design and construction of the project continue despite there being unresolved technical issues, and there is a lot of risk associated with that. ... [The waste at Hanford, stored in 177 deteriorating underground tanks,] is a real risk to the public and the environment. It is essential that this plant work and work well."

- Peter Winokur, Chairman of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board.

"Each day without progress (in treating the waste) further threatens the Columbia River and its surroundings. ... There are critical public health and environmental issues at play. ... [The deadlines] were put in place to ensure the health and safety of the people of Washington and that commitment must continue. ... Falling behind schedule ... is not an option."

- Washington Governor Chris Gregoire

"[The 'design-build' approach] is good if you're building a McDonald's. It's not good if you're building a one-of-a-kind, high-risk nuclear waste facility."

- Gene Aloise, the GAO's director of nuclear non-proliferation and security.

"We've got tough technical issues to deal with ... (but) we will not operate a plant that cannot be operated safely."

- David Huizenga, acting assistant Energy secretary for environmental management.

As these statements make clear, the nuclear industry remains a very dangerous one in which every aspect of design, construction and operation can have very serious implications for the public health and safety. That's why it is so important to make sure that employees who blow the whistle on nuclear safety issues can do without fear of retaliation.