Hanford contractor agrees to settle penalty for waste - Contractor to establish new procedures for handling dangerous waste

RICHLAND, WA — A company that holds contracts for major portions of the cleanup at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation has agreed to establish a temporary holding area for waste that hasn’t been analyzed.

The agreement is part of a settlement between CH2M Hill Plateau Remediation Company – known as CHPRC – and the Washington State Department of Ecology. The settlement emerged from court mediation after CHPRC appealed an Ecology order and $50,000 penalty issued in August 2016.

“It is important to make sure that their cleanup work complies with regulatory requirements in order to make the site safer for people and to reduce environmental threats,” said Jared Mathey, an Ecology compliance inspector. “This agreement fulfills those goals.”

The company uses Hanford’s historic T Plant to treat and store mixed waste (a combination of radioactive and dangerous chemical materials) at Hanford. Workers will use the holding area for wastes generated at T Plant that need to be evaluated. This ensures that the waste held in each container is properly analyzed before moving it into storage.

CHPRC has also agreed to enhanced record-keeping on all of the waste that it generates and subsequently stores at T Plant. The records will allow Ecology to more accurately track what’s being stored and how long it’s been in storage.

Waste storage methods and record-keeping were at issue in the order and penalty that Ecology issued last year. In the settlement agreement, CHPRC doesn’t admit that it was acting improperly but pledges to meet Ecology’s requirements for storage and record-keeping moving forward. The agreement lifts the penalty entirely, but allows imposition of up to $25,000 in stipulated penalties if certain terms aren’t met.

T Plant was the world’s first facility to extract plutonium from uranium fuel rods from a nuclear reactor. And it’s the only one of five plutonium extraction plants built at Hanford that’s still in use – although not for its original purpose. Today CHPRC uses the plant as a certified Treatment, Storage and Disposal Facility to sample, identify, treat and repackage Hanford waste, as well as to repair equipment.

Contact:

Randy Bradbury, communications manager, 509-372-7954, @ecyhanford

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