



PRESS RELEASE

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Hanford Workers File Federal Lawsuit Against Department of Energy and Contractor Over Toxic Vapors

Richland, WA: Hanford Challenge and UA Local 598 today joined forces to take legal action to ensure that their members and all workers at the Hanford nuclear site are protected from exposure to toxic vapors released from Hanford's high-level nuclear waste tanks.

Hundreds of employees work in and around the Hanford Tank Farms where the Department of Energy stores over 56-million gallons of radioactive and chemical waste from decades of plutonium production for nuclear weapons. These workers routinely encounter potentially toxic vapors with inadequate or non-existent protective equipment.

Over the years, some workers exposed to toxic vapors at Hanford have suffered serious long-term health effects such as brain damage, lung disease, and nervous system disorders.

The [complaint](#) filed in federal court today named the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and Hanford contractor Washington River Protection Solutions (WRPS) as defendants.

Pete Nicacio, Business Manager for United Association of Steamfitters and Plumbers, Local 598, which represents Hanford workers, said,

“We have had enough. For years, our members have been exposed and sickened, and Hanford management has denied ever exposing anybody. They don't have the monitoring equipment in place, they don't have enough people to do the monitoring, and worst of all, Hanford officials have made it repeatedly clear that they don't think there is a problem. We are taking this action today to protect our workers.”

The lawsuit was filed prior to a similar action filed by the Washington State Attorney General, today. Both actions were filed under provisions of the federal environmental law governing hazardous waste called the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), which applies to the radioactive and chemical mixed waste stored and treated at Hanford.

The lawsuit announced today seeks specific behaviors from Hanford officials designed to protect workers, including (1) immediately institute protective measures to prevent toxic vapor

exposures, (2) implement systemic changes to Hanford's chemical protection program, and (3) conduct comprehensive medical monitoring for past and present Hanford tank farm workers.

The lawsuit follows the publication of an expert [report](#) commissioned by Hanford after numerous workers were sent for medical evaluation and treatment following toxic vapor exposures at Hanford. The expert report determined Hanford's program to protect workers is inadequate. Findings and recommendations from this report and numerous past reports on Hanford worker exposure to toxic tank waste vapors have yet to be implemented.

"Over 50 workers at Hanford have sought medical evaluation following toxic vapor exposures since last year," said Tom Carpenter, Executive Director of Hanford Challenge. "There have also been recent exposures, due to inadequate protections by Hanford," according to Carpenter. "All tank farm workers should be using supplied air unless and until Hanford is able to conduct real-time monitoring and provide protection from potential exposure to toxic chemicals."

"Hanford's program falls far short of where it needs to be in order to protect workers, or even detect vapor exposures. The cleanup of the most hazardous waste in the world should not come at the expense of the health of the workers conducting that cleanup," said Carpenter.

The union and Hanford Challenge are represented by the law firms of Smith & Lowney, PLLC (Seattle, WA) and Public Justice, PC (Washington, D.C.). Richard Webster, Staff Attorney for the Environmental Enforcement Project at Public Justice said, "Toxic vapors from the waste in tanks are endangering the health of Hanford workers. This violates the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, which specifically and explicitly prohibits even potential endangerment of health. We are therefore pleased to help to enforce federal law in this case."

"Hanford has endangered its workers for far too long. Today, citizens are taking legal action to force the Department of Energy and its contractors to implement long overdue protections for workers on the front line," said Meredith Crafton, an attorney with Smith and Lowney.