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PLAN SET FOR CLEANING UP EXTENSIVE AREA OF GROUNDWATER CONTAMINATION AT HANFORD SITE Record of Decision sets cleanup remedy for most problematic groundwater contamination in central Hanford Site

RICHLAND, WA - The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) this week signed a Record of Decision with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Washington State Department of Ecology to commit to cleaning up one of the most problematic areas of groundwater contamination in the center of the Hanford Site in southeast Washington State.

"This Record of Decision paves the way for building the largest groundwater treatment system to date on the Hanford Site," said Dave Brockman, Manager of DOE's Richland Operations Office. "Pulling this contaminated water out of the ground and treating it is critical to preventing contamination in Hanford's Central Plateau from traveling toward the Columbia River."

A treatment system will be installed to pump contaminated water out of the ground and remove several contaminants. During the Cold War, liquids contaminated with chemicals and radioactive elements were discharged from processing facilities to several soil disposal sites, resulting in a five-square-mile area of groundwater contaminated above drinking water levels. The primary contaminant of concern is carbon tetrachloride, a solvent used in Hanford's plutonium processing facilities. Smaller plumes of other contaminants in the same area will also be treated by this system.

"We are encouraged by DOE's commitment to the goal of restoring the groundwater at 200-ZP-1 to beneficial use," said Dave Einan of EPA's Hanford Project Office.

Work on designing the new treatment system has begun. A detailed schedule for installing a water treatment facility with a throughput of more than 1,600 gallons per minute, along with installing more than 50 wells needed to access groundwater, will be established over the next six months. Initial estimates call for brining the new treatment system on line in two to three years to replace a smaller treatment system that was installed in the 1990s as an interim measure to prevent carbon tetrachloride contamination in the groundwater from spreading.
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Background

The new treatment system is expected to remove 95 percent of the contaminants from groundwater in a five-square-mile area of Hanford's Central Plateau within 25 years. This area is known as the 200-ZP-1 operable unit, one of two groundwater operable units in the 200 West Area of the Hanford Site. To facilitate cleanup, waste sites, facilities, and areas of groundwater contamination (known as plumes) have been grouped by geographic areas, process types, or cleanup components into several operational units. Treated groundwater

will be returned to the aquifer. The remaining contaminants will reduce naturally to final cleanup levels over an additional 100 years. Until cleanup levels are achieved, groundwater use in this area will be restricted through institutional and land use controls.

The existing treatment system has a throughput of approximately 400 gallons per minute and has treated an estimated one million gallons of groundwater, removing approximately 12 tons of carbon tetrachloride since 1994. That system will continue to operate until the new treatment system comes on line by 2011.

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