PAYING FOR HANFORD

DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY
State of Washington

A series of recent reports predict escalating costs and an extended timeline to clean up contamination at Hanford left by four decades of plutonium production. These projections by the U.S. Department of Energy put increasing pressure on efforts to find cheaper, faster cleanup approaches. The push for cleanup alternatives concerns Ecology for several reasons. While we are always open to better, more efficient methods, any proposal must meet statutory and legal requirements to protect human health and the environment, both now and into the future. The ideas we've seen to date don't meet that test. However, one approach could make a dramatic difference in both the total cost and in the time it takes to complete the cleanup – increasing annual funding to the level required to meet legally obligated work deadlines.

The cost of falling behind

Each fiscal year, Energy estimates how much money it would need to stay on track with cleanup deadlines. The president then asks for a much smaller appropriation. Congress consistently and significantly increases Hanford funding over the president's request, but hasn't been able to fully bridge that gap. This shortfall disproportionately affects both the overall time it will take to finish the job at Hanford, and the amount of money it will cost. Missed deadlines snowball over time, pushing work into the future and delaying other work. Note that for FY21, DOE has not yet provided Ecology or EPA a copy of the compliance level funding needed to meet their cleanup obligations under the Tri Party Agreement.

2020 Hanford Budget

$2.11 billion (President's budget)

$3.25 billion ($$ needed to meet deadlines)
$2.53 billion ($$ appropriated)

-$720 million (difference)

$300+ billion

Current total projected cost to clean up Hanford.

Keeping the lights on

But here's the biggest problem – up to half of Hanford's budget goes to maintenance: Roads, utilities, fire, security etc. And those expenses are growing as a percentage of overall spending. This spending does not go to actual cleanup. Every year of delay means another year that millions are spent just to keep the operation going.

The impact of extra funds

In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act appropriated $800 billion to stimulate the national economy during the Great Recession of 2008. Hanford received about $2 billion of that money over three years. In that time, Hanford workers excavated 73 waste sites; tore down and disposed of 67 buildings; built two plants to treat contaminated groundwater (and drilled 303 wells to supply those plants); and made significant progress on demolishing the highly contaminated Plutonium Finishing Plant. Energy's Richland operations office project manager said the $1.6 billion his office received trimmed $3.6 billion off what the total cost of cleanup would have been without the extra funds.

($ in billions)	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY 21	6-year total shortfall
Compliant request*	$3.29	$3.71	$4.03	$2.73	$3.49	$3.25	**	
President's budget	$2.15	$2.33	$2.30	$2.30	$2.19	$2.11	$1.91	
Appropriation	$2.22	$2.40	$2.42	$2.51	$2.53	$2.53	$2.67	
Difference (Appropriation v compliant)	-$1.07	-$1.31	-$1.61	-$0.22	-$0.96	-$0.72		-$5.89

*Compliant request refers to amount needed to meet current milestones
** Awaiting FY21 compliance request numbers from DOE HQ

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