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CHAIN REACTION: THE HANFORD PROJECT

Description

Created for an exhibition at Allied Arts Gallery in Richland, WA (The home to Hanford, the most contaminated nuclear site in the United States). The installation consisted of: a projected video loop, an audio loop, a looped interview with Robert Smith (a retired Hanford worker), an ink drawing on a declassified document (outlining the problem Hanford continues to face with contaminated tumbleweeds, mounted on a bulletin board), 177 tin containers filled with green colored water, four tumbleweeds collected from around the Hanford site (placed under plexiglas), green florescent lighting, and a tumbleweed relocation performance (Hundreds of tumbleweeds were collected from around the Hanford site, loaded into a cargo truck, and later released in the most popular park in town).

Shown with archival inkjet prints by Zach Mazur ([website](#))

Statement

By Gov. Chris Gregoire & Sen. Maria Cantwell in a Special to the Washington Post

Buried in President Bush's proposed budget for next year is a story of broken promises. It's a story that puts our nation's honor -- and our environment, economy and families -- on the line.

The president wants to increase spending on every major category of our government's nuclear program except one: cleaning up the toxic legacy that lurks at nuclear reservations and facilities around the nation.

The administration wants more funding for nuclear weaponry, nuclear energy, nuclear science and management. But it would spend \$800 million less on environmental cleanups at 20 federal nuclear sites in 14 states.

Its request for cleanups at nuclear sites in several states is the lowest since 1997.

Federal cleanups are not yet completed in Washington state, New York, South Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Illinois, Kentucky, California, Idaho, New Mexico, Texas, Arkansas, Nevada or Utah. Our government is turning its back on long-standing commitments.

Nothing better illustrates why America must clean up the enormous quantities of waste at these sites than Hanford, our country's most-contaminated federal nuclear reservation. Here, the United States produced weapons-grade plutonium, unlocking the code to the power that helped win the Cold War.

The legacy of that era is a witches' brew of the world's most dangerous materials, housed in half-century-old storage tanks, that are contaminating nearby soils and aquifers.

Will America keep its promises and clean up this toxic legacy? Will our nation and Congress allow the administration to turn its back on millions of Americans?

Success won't come easily. Conscientious Americans must join the states that are living with unfinished nuclear cleanups to compel the Energy Department to get its program moving again.

And time is not on our side.

Just below ground at the Hanford site are 177 enormous steel tanks. They contain 53 million gallons of heavy metals, acids, solvents and highly radioactive elements, including plutonium, cesium, strontium and uranium. Sixty-seven tanks are confirmed leakers, and nearly all are well beyond their design lifespan.

According to the Government Accountability Office, the federal government and its contractors also buried thousands of tons of radioactive and hazardous waste in unlined landfills and injected 450 billion gallons of liquid waste into ponds, ditches and drainfields at the site. That is about the amount of water that flows through the Potomac River in a month.

As you read this, a huge plume of groundwater contaminated with radiation and heavy metals is moving from Hanford toward the Columbia River.

If this toxic brew were buried 12 miles from the Potomac, the water source for hundreds of thousands of people in the D.C. area, the administration would undoubtedly make it a top budget priority.

We are asking for nothing less for our communities. Adequate cleanup funding is imperative. And it doesn't require a budget increase; President Bush only has to get his nuclear priorities right.

Each passing day increases the risk of leakage and catastrophic tank failure at Hanford. Each delay increases the risk to workers, the environment and more than a million people who live and work near the Columbia River downstream from Hanford.

In the Oregon counties along the river below Hanford, 32,000 companies depend on clean, safe water to provide 500,000 jobs with a payroll of \$18 billion -- 30 percent of the state's economic activity.

In the Washington counties below Hanford, 25,000 companies rely on water to provide 280,000 jobs and a payroll of \$9.5 billion -- 10 percent of the state's economic activity.

Bush's proposed budget falls \$600 million short of what the Energy Department says it needs for cleanup in 2009. The department is grossly out of compliance with major portions of the cleanup order signed 19 years ago on behalf of President George H.W. Bush that includes Washington state, the Energy Department and the Environmental Protection Agency .

If this budget stands, only one tank at Hanford will be emptied in 2009. At that rate, it will take 140 years to empty the remaining 142 single-shell tanks and process the waste.

We don't have 140 years. The river doesn't have 140 years.

A dedicated pool of skilled individuals is ready to work, day in and day out, to clean up Hanford. They need our support to get the job done.

A nation that cracked the code to the nuclear era can clean up that effort's toxic legacy. What's more, we are obligated to. Just as we must support the men and women in uniform who defend our freedom, we must also protect those communities that answered the call to duty.

We are counting on the Bush administration and Congress to honor their commitments to the communities that helped win the Cold War. That is the America we can all be proud of.