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Date: 7/20/2011 1:34 PM
Subject: Safety Culture at Hanford's tank farms
Attachments: andrewt@dnfsb.docx

I appreciate the DNFSB's interest in safety. Please see attached. Thank you, Bill Bricker

I am gravely concerned about the safety culture that currently exists at Hanford and that has existed for the last 2.5 years. This I have experienced first hand as a nuclear defense worker for contractor URS's daughter company Washington River Protection Solutions (WRPS). WRPS took over the tank farms contract on October 1, 2008 and has come in like a "bull in a china shop" shattering worker confidence in safety in general and by destroying any and all cooperation between workers and management.

I started work in 1984 at Hanford's "N" Reactor in reactor operations. I was a recent university graduate and I took pride in what I was doing for my country by contributing my talents to further her defense efforts. I saw the importance of safety early on in my career and I wanted to be a part of that effort so I transitioned into safety programs and became a Health Physicist. After ten years and a few contractor changes I went from the exempt ranks of being an engineer, supervisor, and manager into the union ranks as a Health Physics Technician (HPT). There I have been.

I have experienced the "bull in a china shop" mentality with a new incoming contractor one other time and that was when the environmental restoration contract (ERC) was given to Bechtel and its preselected subcontractors in 1994. At that time all safety programs were discontinued while the contractor decided what was and was not important. Thank goodness the Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary, Hazel O'Leary, decided to investigate and put pressure on Hanford's and other DOE sites' contractors to start paying heed to safety issues and concerns.

Since that time the safety culture at certain facilities has become pejorative and at this time there is no worker, union or exempt, that dares raise any concern about health or safety to the current tank farms contractor. In fact there have been employee concerns written by groups of thirty or more workers who are concerned about the indiscriminate terminations of workers who have either raised safety concerns [to both the company, WRPS, and the DOE Office of River Protection (ORP) employee concerns (EC)] or shut down work due to unsafe conditions at the jobsite. These group employee concerns have been neither investigated nor addressed back to the workers who signed them. That has caused them to forward subsequent group employee concerns in which they complain about the "chilling effect" that WRPS has instilled in the workplace due to the termination of an HPT (raising numerous safety concerns) and four other HPTs for refusing to work on unsafe jobsites. WRPS has gone so far as discouraging the use of the time-tested performance/problem evaluation system (PER) via a direct letter from the company president and intimidating management memos. Over the last two years the current contractor at the tank farms has bullied and molified the workers into a state of total submission. If you personally were to travel there today you would not find one; no, not even one worker who would be willing to talk to you for fear of retaliation from WRPS. The workers are afraid for their jobs and the whole facility is "chilled". In fact an independent audit was performed in 2010 by the WRPS EC office and there were detrimental findings citing a "chilling effect" that would prevent workers from bringing up safety concerns. This audit was never released to the workers but remained concealed by the EC.

I am asking the DNFSB and the DOE to investigate the retaliations and wrongdoings of a company that has suppressed the ability of the nuclear defense worker to raise concerns about safety and health which are important issues to us all.