

# Radioactive Waste Still Flooding Columbia River, EPA Says

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*Featured image: Columbia River in Hanford Reach National Monument, Washington. (Photo via Department of Energy)*

*KENNEWICK, Wash. (CN) – Groundwater contaminated with radioactive waste from the decommissioned Hanford nuclear facility in Washington state is still “flowing freely” into the Columbia River, a program manager with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said at a meeting of the Hanford Advisory Board.*

The announcement came as part of a five-year review of cleanup measures taken at the Superfund site. Officials with the EPA and the Department of Energy said at a meeting Wednesday that the review showed most of the cleanup actions at Hanford were properly “protective,” meaning the public was shielded from the worst of the site’s estimated 500 million gallons of potentially radioactive waste.

Radioactive sludge in shuttered reactors, contaminated soil in landfill sites and equipment that was once used to refine the uranium that fueled the nuclear bomb dropped on Nagasaki were all properly contained, according to the report.

But there was a glaring exception: groundwater contaminated with hexavalent chromium and strontium-90 was still flowing into the nearby Columbia River, according to a presentation from Mike Cline, director of the Department of Energy’s Soil & Groundwater Division.

“Contaminated in-area groundwater is still flowing freely into the Columbia,” EPA Project Manager Dennis Faulk told members of the board.



Source: Courthouse News Service

The stretch of river adjacent to the Hanford nuclear facility, called the Hanford Reach, was declared a national monument in 2000 by then-President Bill Clinton. That designation is now under threat from an executive order by President Donald Trump directing Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to review the status of 27 national monuments.

The agencies say they will build additional, stronger wells and a “permeable reactive barrier” to hold the toxic water. But the announcement came as the agency mulled major cuts to Hanford’s operating budget under Trump’s proposed budget plan.



Columbia River river deposits (Photo by Rich Steele via U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

The EPA and the Department of Energy said the plan would mean cuts totaling \$120 million

at Hanford.

That worried officials, who said they are already struggling to keep up with cleanup under the current budget.

“We don’t have enough funding as it is to do the work that needs to be done,” said Randy Bradbury, spokesman for the Washington state Department of Ecology’s Hanford Nuclear Waste program. “So the cuts are very concerning.”

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