

**Questions and Answers for the U.S. Department of Energy's
May 9, 2003 Press Conference on the State's Mixed Waste Order**

What does the state's order do?

The state's order requires DOE to "immediately stop creating a backlog of untreated mixed waste."

What is mixed waste?

We use the term at Hanford to mean radioactive waste mixed with chemical or other hazardous substances. It could be as simple as using chemicals to analyze a sample of tank waste or using grease on equipment that also comes in contact with radioactive materials (like would occur at the spent nuclear fuel project). The waste in the Office of River Protection's underground tanks is mixed and much of the soil adjacent to tanks and projects has been contaminated with mixed waste. Some of the solid waste stored in the burial grounds is mixed low-level waste or mixed transuranic waste.

What projects are affected by the requirement to stop creating mixed waste?

Analytical services seem to be particularly affected. That means all samples from tanks, soils, the plutonium finishing plant, and other projects cannot be analyzed because that process generates mixed waste. In addition, it basically requires the shutdown of the Plutonium Finishing Plant, including stabilization, deactivation and decontamination (D&D) activities. It will curtail single shell tank interim stabilization and Tank C-106 retrieval – key risk reduction projects. It will restrict preventative and corrective maintenance and D&D work in areas that could generate mixed waste. Specifically, it will limit D&D work on the Central Plateau, including that on the plutonium concentration facilities and the now shut down U Plant reprocessing canyon. It will also detrimentally impact PNNL activities in support of cleanup, including Waste Treatment Plant process testing, vadose zone characterization, and support for K-basin sludge retrieval. In addition, there are eight major national security programs impacted -- including work for the National Nuclear Security Administration and the Department of Defense.

Does this mean DOE could actually shut down these projects?

Yes. We will be taking a phased approach to most projects, but some contractors will immediately cease operations. In some projects, work can be deferred so as not to generate newly generated waste.

Isn't DOE being overly conservative?

The Department and our contracting teams have no choice but to comply with the terms of the order as directed by the State. We do not have the option to interpret the order in any way other than what is specifically spelled out in the plain language of the order.

Questions and Answers (continued)

How many jobs will be impacted?

There are many variables that could affect individual jobs and our contractors are analyzing workforce impacts. We will let you know the impacts from the state's order.

Why would the state want to shut down these projects?

You will have to ask the state.

If the state didn't intend for these projects to be impacted, wouldn't it be easier to ask the state to modify the order?

We do not know what the state intended. We do not have the option to interpret the order in any way other than what is specifically spelled out in the plain language of the order.

How do you believe this will impact DOE's relationship with the state?

We are committed to reducing risk and accelerating cleanup at Hanford and we are getting results. We will stay focused on our mutual goal of cleaning up this site and getting the work done.

Shouldn't DOE just comply with the state's wishes to regulate TRU waste?

No. The U.S. Congress reserved for the federal government the authority to regulate TRU. We cannot give that authorization to any state.

Why did it take DOE nearly a week to act on the state's order?

This is a far-reaching order. It has taken time to analyze the impacts and proceed with the necessary steps to comply with the state's order.

Has DOE been in contact with the state since it issued the order?

We continue our day-to-day working relationship with the state. In addition, we have notified them of our direction to our contractors.

What will happen if the state modifies its order? How long will it take you to turn around your direction to your contractors?

As it takes some period of time to shut down operations, it takes time to restart them. We are very concerned about the delay this order causes in many of our key projects.