

**Testimony of  
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U.S. Department of Energy**

**Before the  
Subcommittee on Financial and Contracting Oversight  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
U.S. Senate**

**March 11, 2014**

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Johnson and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding safety culture and related issues at the Department of Energy's Hanford Site Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant Project (WTP).

I would like to take a brief moment to describe the unique role of the Independent Oversight Program within the Office of Health, Safety and Security which has conducted safety culture reviews at Hanford and elsewhere. The mission of this program is to provide DOE line management, Congress, and other stakeholders with an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of DOE policy and line management performance in safety and security, and other critical areas as directed by the Secretary of Energy. This mission is accomplished by conducting activity, facility, site, and Department-wide performance-based assessments that are designed to verify that the Department's safeguards and security interests are protected, that the Department can effectively respond to emergencies, and that Department's operations are conducted in a manner that protects its employees, the public, and the environment. These assessments complement line management's responsibility for security and safety program oversight, contract management, and self-assessments. The results of these assessments are reports that provide information and analysis regarding the effectiveness, vulnerabilities, and trends in DOE safety and security programs and performance, and identify issues requiring corrective action as well as recommended areas for improvement.

Our team has completed two safety culture assessments at the WTP, one in 2010 and one in 2012. The assessments included interviews with employees of the Office of River Protection and the contractor, Bechtel National, Incorporated (BNI), as well as a detailed review of their safety programs, processes and procedures. Detailed reports of these assessments and their recommendations have been provided to the Committee. I will summarize our findings briefly.

In our 2010 assessment, we found that most personnel who were interviewed expressed that their managers encouraged a questioning attitude and that they were comfortable with raising safety concerns. However, some individuals believed that there was a

chilled environment that discouraged reporting of safety concerns, and some BNI employees expressed concerns about retaliation for reporting safety concerns. Our report contained a number of detailed recommendations for both the ORP and BNI. Among those recommendations were that BNI strengthen processes and procedures for the resolution of nuclear safety concerns and identify mechanisms to strengthen trust among the workforce and better communicate information to employees.

Two years later in 2012, we performed a second comprehensive assessment (covering both ORP and BNI) to measure the state of the safety culture at the WTP. For this assessment we engaged external independent safety culture experts with extensive experience in safety culture reviews to supplement and complement the nuclear safety expertise of our staff. That helped us to more effectively diagnose the safety culture attributes at WTP and learn things we didn't learn during our 2010 assessment. In 2012, we found that most personnel at WTP believed that safety was a high priority. However, during the evaluation, a significant number of Federal and contractor staff expressed reluctance to raise safety or quality concerns for various reasons. Fear of retaliation was identified in some BNI groups as inhibiting the identification of problems. Employees' right to raise safety concerns without fear of retaliation is not only protected by the law but is an essential element of a healthy safety culture, and therefore significant management attention is needed to improve the safety culture at WTP. We found that while managers espoused support for a healthy nuclear safety culture, they did not have a full appreciation of the current culture or the nature and level of effort needed to foster a healthy safety culture, and the WTP community had not been sufficiently engaged in creating a mutually shared and desired culture.

We are currently conducting a follow-up assessment of safety culture at WTP. That review will be completed this spring and a written report presented to management. We look forward to sharing the results of that assessment with the Committee when our report is completed.

A strong safety culture starts with strong, ongoing support by the most senior leaders of the organization. I want to take this opportunity to assure the members of the Subcommittee that this is a very high priority for the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Energy. With the permission of the Subcommittee, I would like to include for the Record a copy of a September 20, 2013 memorandum signed by both the Secretary and Deputy Secretary titled "*Personal Commitment to Health and Safety through Leadership, Employee Engagement, and Organizational Learning.*" The Memorandum provides visionary leadership and a deep personal commitment to building the type of organization in which we can all be proud to work. A vibrant and healthy organizational culture will help the Department to achieve its national security, scientific and environmental missions safely and securely, and we are committed to helping the Department to achieve that goal.

I would be happy to answer any questions that members of the Subcommittee may have.



The Secretary of Energy  
Washington, DC 20585

September 20, 2013

MEMORANDUM FOR HEADS OF DEPARTMENTAL ELEMENTS

FROM: ERNEST J. MONIZ  
SECRETARY OF ENERGY

DANIEL B. PONEMAN  
DEPUTY SECRETARY

SUBJECT: Personal Commitment to Health and Safety through Leadership,  
Employee Engagement, and Organizational Learning.

We are writing to ask you to join us in reaffirming our personal and professional commitment to safely fulfilling the Department's important mission responsibilities. The Department's thousands of Federal, laboratory, and contractor employees work hard every day in pursuit of energy independence, global scientific leadership, national security, and environmental stewardship. They are the key to our success. We would like to revitalize our efforts to protect the health and safety of our employees, as well as the health and safety of those who reside in the communities in which the Department operates or are otherwise affected by our work. The Department's ultimate safety objective is to have zero accidents, work-related injuries and illnesses, regulatory violations, and reportable environmental releases. The Department's Integrated Safety Management policy is the foundation of our approach to safety and health.

The following precepts reflect our strong commitments to safety and health. We ask you to join us in advancing these leadership, employee engagement, organizational, and educational goals in your areas of responsibility.

- We will pursue a safety culture built on an environment of trust and mutual respect, worker engagement and open communication, an atmosphere that promotes a questioning attitude with effective resolution of reported problems, and continuous learning.
- We will operate our facilities and conduct work activities in a manner that protects our employees, the public, and the environment. We recognize that meeting minimum requirements merely reflects the starting point in our pursuit of excellence and is not the end objective.
- Each one of us is responsible for safety at the Department. We will strive to ensure that every employee understands his or her role, responsibility, authority, and accountability in safely planning, executing, and monitoring work performance.



- We will foster a safety conscious work environment across all Departmental operations. Federal, laboratory, and contractor workers have the right to identify and raise issues that affect their safety and health or that of their co-workers openly, and without fear of reprisal. We must not deter, discourage, or penalize employees for the timely identification of safety, health, environmental, quality or security issues, the reporting of illnesses or injuries, or the use of Employee Concerns or Differing Professional Opinion Programs. Our workers will receive a prompt, professional, and transparent evaluation and resolution of their concerns.
- We will learn from our mistakes and experiences. We will report errors and problems, establish vigorous corrective action programs, monitor performance through multiple means, learn from operational experience, and encourage a questioning attitude.

We greatly value – and depend upon – the service of the men and women working to achieve the Department’s important missions that the American people have entrusted to us. We can only advance these challenging missions if we provide all of our employees a safe and healthy work environment and foster a culture in which workers at all levels are empowered to bring forth problems, participate in the development of solutions, and are considered partners in decisions that affect their work.

Thank you for your leadership in ensuring the safe execution of the Department’s vital and urgent responsibilities.