

## The Need for Hanford Cleanup

*At the end of a 2010 forum on Hanford cleanup, participants requested that the Forum Steering Committee craft a statement about the need for Hanford cleanup. This request came out of the realization that there was no statement the group could all point to identifying the need for Hanford cleanup. It is not intended to be signed, official or “owned” by anyone—rather, it is an authorless, open-source statement. The Steering Committee is happy with it, and hopes that it captures the essence of why we are involved in the important work of Hanford cleanup.*

More than 40 years of plutonium production for America’s nuclear weapons program extensively contaminated the Hanford Site in southeastern Washington State. Following the end of plutonium production in 1989, federal, state and local governments, Native American Tribes, and citizen groups joined together to advocate for and compel Hanford cleanup. Hanford Site workers are now engaged in the world’s largest environmental cleanup project. The cleanup encompasses more than 1,900 waste sites, ranging from small areas of surface contamination to 177 aging underground storage tanks containing about 53 million gallons of highly radioactive and chemically hazardous waste. There is urgency to the cleanup, as contaminants continue to spread and waste storage facilities age.

Hanford cleanup is necessary to prevent further contamination of the Columbia River. The site is located in the heart of a rapidly expanding agricultural community, a growing population, and a fishing and recreation industry that stretches to the Pacific Ocean. The cleanup is also necessary to restore precious and valuable resources such as the groundwater; comply with environmental laws and restore the damaged environment; preserve treaty rights; and eliminate or reduce risks to all people who live in, work in, or visit the area.

While significant cleanup progress has been made, success is still far from assured. A number of challenging technical issues remain to be solved and public and regulatory agreement on and acceptance of some cleanup strategies is still needed. Successful cleanup will require a sustained, candid dialogue and substantial agreement and cooperation among stakeholders, regulators and governments. It will also require significant federal funding for the remaining four decades or more needed to complete the work.