

Fact Sheet: Citizens Monitoring of Columbia River Radionuclide

June 15, 2005

Background

The Government Accountability Project (GAP) has released a study that examines radionuclide (radioactivity and chemical concentrations in living and environmental materials) at the perimeter of the Hanford Nuclear site. These levels were compared to background radiation standards and previous studies on comparable samples. Results indicate that contamination levels are higher than previously indicated.

Report Findings

- **Plutonium is being found in water creatures that are consumed by the public:** Increased levels of plutonium, strontium, mercury, beryllium, uranium, and cesium were detected in both biological and mineral samples. Plutonium found in freshwater Asian clams and numerous types of fish particularly requires further study, as many individuals, particularly Native Americans, eat these fish and are introducing these radionuclide into their systems.
- **Berries and other plant-life are toxic:** Radionuclide levels were higher in some offsite plant and animal tissues than had been previously reported for the Hanford site. These levels reach unacceptably high concentrations for plants such as mulberry plants, exceeding mulberry plant data from past studies. These levels, found in mulberry leaves, indicate that the mulberries themselves are of great concern.
- **Higher levels of strontium-90 (a radioactive element) were found in rodent, coyote, and deer scat.** This means that certain radionuclides are finding their way into our ecosystem, indicating bio-accumulation in higher organism.
- **Hanford contamination is more geographically widespread than previously thought:** The size of the offsite area showing increased radionuclide concentrations is larger than previously reported. Radionuclide was found 20 miles upstream from the Hanford site on the Columbia River.
- **Attic Dust found from homes in Richland indicate windblown exposure:** Testing done on household attic dusts in Richland, WA indicate past airborne radionuclide offsite distribution from Hanford.