

Radiological Threat to U.S West Coast: Is the Truth about the Hanford Tunnel Collapse Being Concealed from the Public?

Global Research News Hour Episode 181

By [Michael Welch](#)

Global Research, May 13, 2017

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Environment](#), [GLOBAL RESEARCH NEWS HOUR](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

"There is no indication of a radiological release..." Destry Henderson, deputy news manager for the Hanford Joint Information Center [1]

"The way that I look at this whole thing since the collapse happened ...is this is a cover-up of the covering up of the collapsed hole." – Mimi German (from this week's interview.)

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For the first time in four years, on the morning of Tuesday May 9th the US Department of Energy declared a site-wide emergency at the Hanford Site in Washington State. A 20 foot section of a tunnel at the site containing highly toxic and radioactive material had collapsed exposing the contents to the atmosphere.



The Hanford Nuclear Reservation is 586 square miles or about 1,500 square km in area and is located in Southeast Washington State, along the Columbia River and about 170 miles (270 km) east of Seattle. This is the site at which the world's first three nuclear reactors were constructed, and out of which the most of the plutonium for America's nuclear weapons were produced. [2]

photo courtesy of nuclearhotseat.com

According to [Physicians for Social Responsibility](#), Hanford is home to 60% (by volume) of all of the high level radioactive waste stored in the United States. Fifty-three million gallons of high-level radioactive and chemical waste are stored in 177 huge underground tanks with more than one million gallons having leaked from these tanks. Nearly 80% of the Department of Energy's inventory of spent nuclear fuel rods was stored in basins just 400

yards from the Columbia River.[3]

The tunnel which collapsed was located next to the Plutonium Uranium Extraction Plant (PUREX) located in the center of the Hanford Site, in an area known as the 200 East Area. [4] The tunnel had been used to transport spent fuel from the reactors to an area where the plutonium generated in nuclear reactions would be separated from the original uranium. This process generated a lot of highly toxic waste and as a result became highly radioactive.

According to officials, the collapse was discovered during routine surveillance Tuesday morning.[5]

Workers in the affected area, north of the Wye barricade, were told to take cover, that is go indoors and shut off ventilation systems. Later in the day, non-essential north of the Wye barricade were told to go home early.[6]

According to the DOE, beginning the morning of Wednesday May 10th, crews began work filling the hole with 550 cubic yards of soil in 53 trucks were used. The emergency was terminated later that evening at 11:21pm.[7]

Employees have begun to return to work.

On this week's Global Research News Hour we present perspectives from three people closely observing this crisis.

Tom Carpenter is the executive director of the worker advocacy group [Hanford Challenge](#). Carpenter explains some of the background of the site, he relays what he has been told by workers since the tunnel collapse, and he outlines some of the concerns he has about the responsible authorities putting Public Relations ahead of stewardship to the public and the environment.

Mimi German, a past guest of this program, is a self-identified 'Earth activist'. She is the founder of [Radcast.org](#) and active with the anti-nuclear group '[No Nukes Northwest](#).' German points to known radiation readings and other contradictory indicators leading her to suspect that the emergency is far from over and that the radiological releases were worse than the officials are letting on.

Susannah Frame is the multi-award winning investigative reporter for NBC affiliate [KING5](#) in Seattle. She broke the story about the Hanford tunnel collapse and updates listeners on the situation (as of Thursday May 11th), explains what is known about what most likely caused it, and outlines how badly things could have gone.

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Notes:

1. <http://www.king5.com/news/local/hanford/tunnel-collapses-at-hanford-no-radiation-released-officials-say/438227872>
2. <http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/04/29/hanford-not-fukushima-is-the-big-radiological-threat-to-the-west-coast/>
3. <http://www.psr.org/chapters/washington/hanford/hanford-facts.html>
4. <http://www.hanford.gov/c.cfm/eoc/?page=290>
5. ibid
6. ibid
7. ibid

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