

House Bill Analysis

SJM 8020

HOUSE AGRICULTURE AND ECOLOGY COMMITTEE

February
24, 2000

- SJM 8020 petitions the President of the United States and Congress to provide full funding for cleanup of Hanford radioactive tank waste.

BACKGROUND:

Sixty percent of the nation's nuclear waste is stored in aging tanks at the Hanford Site, a 560 square-mile area in southeastern Washington near Richland. The tank waste, which has been accumulating since 1944, is the result of producing plutonium for national defense. There are 177 underground storage tanks containing 54 million gallons of highly radioactive waste. Each tank is about the size of a football field (300 feet by 160 feet) and 150 feet high.

On May 15, 1989, the U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and Washington Department of Ecology signed a comprehensive cleanup and compliance agreement for the cleanup of the Hanford Reservation. The purpose of the agreement is to: define and rank cleanup actions, establish responsibilities, provide a basis for budgeting, and achieve full regulatory compliance and remediation, with enforceable milestones. The agreement was amended in October, 1993, with a plan to use vitrification to solidify high-level and low-level waste stored in the tanks. Vitrification changes the form of waste from a leachable sludge into an immobile solid.

Facility construction for vitrification of low-activity waste was scheduled to begin in 1994, and facility construction for vitrification of high-level waste is scheduled to begin in 2002. The total cost of cleaning up the 177 underground storage tanks at Hanford is estimated at \$30.5 billion. This is less than the \$35 billion spent annually on nuclear weapons and weapons related programs. A funding increase of \$500 million per year starting in 2001 is said to be necessary in order to set aside the funds needed to pay for treatment.

SUMMARY:

The President and Congress are asked to provide full funding as necessary to build the vitrification plant, retrieve waste from the tanks, feed waste into the plant, and dispose of the resulting glass logs on schedule to meet the negotiated dates contained in the Tri-Party Agreement.