

DOE to consider Hanford for mercury storage

By Annette Cary, Herald staff writer

The [Department of Energy](#) will consider the Hanford nuclear reservation as one of seven possible sites for long-term storage of the nation's elemental mercury, said a notice Thursday in the Federal Register.

The nation could have 8,300 to 11,000 tons of mercury from private sources that would be eligible for storage over 40 years, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

DOE is looking for storage sites after the Mercury Export Ban Act of 2008 prohibited the export of mercury beginning in 2013 and required the agency to have facilities ready to manage and store mercury generated in the United States. It is a new responsibility for the [DOE Office of Environmental Management](#), which is responsible for work at Hanford.

Congress found that the free trade of elemental mercury on the world market, at relatively low prices and in ready supply, encourages the continued use of mercury outside of the United States. Banning its export could decrease the availability of it and encourage developing countries to switch to affordable mercury alternatives.

Mercury is highly toxic to humans, ecosystems and wildlife, the 2008 act said. The use of mercury in the United States is declining but as many as 10 percent of women here of childbearing age have mercury in the blood at a level that could put a baby at risk.

Several industries use significant quantities of mercury that could be required to be stored. It's used in the chlorine and caustic soda manufacturing process, reclaimed from recycling and waste recovery activities, and generated as a byproduct of the gold mining process.

DOE plans to prepare a study, called an environmental impact statement, to decide which site or combination of sites should be used to store mercury. A draft study is expected to be issued this fall.

Sites being considered besides Hanford include the Grand Junction Disposal Site in Colorado; the Idaho National Laboratory; Hawthorne Army Depot in Nevada; Kansas City Plant in Missouri; the Savannah River Site in South Carolina and Waste Control Specialists in Andrews, Texas.

DOE already stores about 1,300 tons of mercury at the Y-12 National Security complex in Oak Ridge, Tenn., but it is not being considered for additional storage. The Department of Defense also stores about 4,800 tons of mercury at various locations.

DOE will look at available buildings at the sites under consideration that could be modified, plus the possibility of constructing new buildings.

It will consider whether mercury can be stored at sites without disrupting work or plans there and whether flooring could be installed that would support the weight of mercury. It also will consider access to transportation routes and local and regional land use plans.

The environmental study will look at factors such as the potential effects on the public health from routine operations of storing the mercury and from accident scenarios, such as natural disasters, and potential effects on the environment.

DOE plans a public meeting in Richland to consider what should be included in the environmental study. It will be 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. July 28 in the Clarion Hotel, 1515 George Washington Way.

The meeting will open with a one-hour open house to allow the public to view information and talk to staff before formal public comments begin.

DOE has set up a website at www.mercurystorageeis.com.