



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

Richland Field Office

3100 Port of Benton Blvd., Richland, WA 99354 • 509-372-7950

April 22, 2026

26-NWP-056

Susan Coleman, Chair
Hanford Advisory Board
245 Torbett Street
Richland, WA, 99354

Re: Department of Ecology Response to Building Trust through Public Involvement
(HAB Consensus Advice #324)

Dear Susan Coleman:

Thank you for Hanford Advisory Board (Board) Consensus Advice #324. The Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) believes meaningful public involvement, outreach, and engagement is a key component in ensuring that Hanford cleanup is done in a safe, efficient manner that reflects community values and priorities. We appreciate the Board's advice to the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) agencies on ways to ensure this work is done successfully.

Ecology agrees with the Board that strong public involvement throughout the region is crucial to the future of Hanford cleanup, and the foundation for this is built on knowledge and awareness. Our agency places a high priority on outreach, education, and customer service, and we are always looking for ways to make this work more accessible, efficient, and meaningful.

In 2025, the Nuclear Waste Program outreach and education team attended or hosted 45 outreach and education opportunities, reaching more than 5,100 people. At these events we discuss our agency's role at Hanford, explain history and cleanup progress at the site, and educate on related topics using a variety of methods. These events included classroom visits; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fairs; community events; presentations to civic organizations; a mock Hanford workshop with students; and more.

In addition to the formal public involvement opportunities, we collaborate on with the other TPA agencies, Ecology has continued our virtual Let's Talk About Hanford series, started a quarterly external newsletter, created new informational publications about Hanford cleanup, and continued to update or create new content for our website and social media channels.

We share the Board's concern about responses in the TPA Public Involvement Survey that indicate low trust that public input influences the agencies' decisions. To help address those responses, we have developed several publications [explaining the public input process](#)¹ and [tips for providing a meaningful comment](#)². We are also working to share at Board or public meetings examples where public input has influenced or led to changes in the agencies' decisions.

Ecology accepts the Board's advice on public involvement. The responses below provide our agency's perspective on each of the Board's recommendations about public involvement. We also support the steps listed in the [U.S. Department of Energy \(USDOE\) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's \(EPA\) joint response](#)³ to this advice.

Advice and Response:

- **Advice:** As requested, this advice provides specific, additional guidance on public involvement strategies-whether that be general education or formally required outreach. The first step is to develop specific measurable goals, identify target audiences, understand how to reach different audiences through meetings/social media/other types of gatherings and communication, and measure success for different types of outreach and education. Public engagement goals must be adopted for multi-year periods, updated each year (considering prior year evaluation), and evaluated to inform and continuously improve future engagement opportunities. These goals need to be developed well in advance of the start of a comment period or engagement activity, in collaboration with the HAB.

Response: Ecology agrees with the HAB's advice that effective engagement is based on thoughtful planning, articulated goals, targeted messages, understanding the audience, and measuring success metrics. These strategic engagement aspects will be addressed in our Nuclear Waste Program's upcoming Community Engagement Plan to ensure the work we do at Hanford and other non-Hanford nuclear sites meets community needs.

Outreach and engagement for our program will follow a Scoping—Planning—Implementation—Evaluation process to facilitate direct and meaningful engagement with many audiences, including overburdened communities and vulnerable populations. Our program's plan will also incorporate best practices and information from the TPA Public Involvement Plan to remain consistent over the years of outreach and engagement and build strong relationships for the future.

¹ Ecology's "What is a Public Comment Period?" publication:
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/2305012.pdf>

² Ecology's "Tips for Effective Public Comment" publication:
<https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/2305008.pdf>

³ Joint USDOE/EPA response to HAB Advice #324: <https://www.hanford.gov/files.cfm/26-HOC-0005 - Letter1.pdf>

Ecology will continue to conduct formal public involvement in coordination with USDOE and EPA, following requirements and guidance outlined in the TPA and associated TPA Public Involvement Plan. We look forward to early collaboration with the Board when feasible and appropriate, and always welcome feedback after an event or meeting.

- **Advice:** The board advises the TPA agencies to embrace an approach to public involvement and engagement based on the following principles as articulated in HAB Advice #239:
"The art and craft of public involvement is successful when: clear goals are defined; stakeholders contribute early to the design and development of public involvement; involvement is interactive, inclusive, engaging and respectful; the public has early input influencing the decision-making process (for example, the identification of alternatives for evaluation); the decision-makers demonstrate openness to having input influence their decisions and the decision-making process; and the public sees meaningful results from participation."
- **Advice:** The Board advises the TPA agencies to regularly gather input on public involvement, both formally and informally, from the HAB, stakeholders, and Tribal Nations.
- **Advice:** The Board advises the TPA agencies to leverage the unique cross-section of stakeholders and Tribal Nations of the HAB to review and discuss targeted involvement and communication strategies.

Response: In general, Ecology agrees with these three advice points. We will work to engage early with the Board, Tribes, and stakeholders on public involvement when feasible and appropriate. For instance, Ecology has routinely engaged with the Board, Tribes, and stakeholders formally and informally the last several years on public involvement plans for the upcoming comment period on the Hanford Sitewide Permit, Revision 9A. We look forward to similar early engagements, when possible, on other projects in the future. Ecology will continue to gather general input formally and informally throughout the year and after events.

- **Advice:** The Board encourages the TPA agencies to consider and incorporate ideas articulated in the included sounding board as part of the agencies' ongoing public involvement practice. Contained within the sounding board are Board members' and interested members of the public's ideas for engaging community members to increase public trust.

Response: Ecology appreciates the time spent by Board members and interested parties on contributing to the sounding board included with this advice. Our team already follows a variety of the guidance provided, but we're continuing to evaluate all the recommendations made. Some suggested actions we plan to take include:

- Stating our goal(s) at the beginning of public meetings.
- Continuing to not advertise an end time for meetings hosted by Ecology, unless the venue has a set close time. If there is a time constraint, we will strive to get contact information and follow up on unanswered questions.

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- Issuing an additional “reminder” public notice the day of a public meeting.
- Offering open houses for educational opportunities before public meetings when appropriate and feasible.
- Providing children’s educational activities at public meetings.
- Continuing to provide language access resources, and expand upon these resources as feasible.

Thank you again for providing the agencies with the Board’s consensus advice. If you have any questions regarding this response, please contact Ryan Miller, Communications Manager, at ryan.miller@ecy.wa.gov or (509) 537-2228, or me at stephanie.schleif@ecy.wa.gov or (509) 537-2229.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Schleif
Program Manager
Nuclear Waste Program

cc electronic:

Roberto Armijo, EPA
Laura Beulow, EPA
Tim Walsh, USDOE
Ray Geimer, USDOE
Kelly Snyder, USDOE
Meegan Tripp, USDOE
Ryan Miller, Ecology
HAB Correspondence Control
USDOE Correspondence Control