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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6150

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February 26, 2013

Mr. Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

On February 15, 2013, the U.S. Department of Energy publicly announced that one of the single-shell, high-level radioactive waste storage tanks (Tank T-111) at the Hanford Reservation had an unexplained loss of liquid. This tank was classified as an "assumed leaker" in 1979. Interim stabilization measures were completed in February 1995. As a result of this announcement, further discussions with DOE officials at Hanford during my tour of the site on February 19th and the announcement by Governor Jay Inslee on February 22nd that it appears that five additional single-shell tanks are also leaking, I am requesting that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigate the following:

1. How were the recent tank problems identified and do changes need to be made in the tank monitoring program, especially for the single-shells tanks?
2. Are the maintenance and remedial programs in the tank farms to limit water intrusion and the risk of releases from the Hanford high-level waste tanks, especially the single-shell tanks, adequate? If not, what additional actions should be taken to limit water intrusion and reduce the risk of leaks?
3. When did DOE and its site contractors learn of these recent problems and did DOE and its contractors report them in a timely manner?
4. What are the current protocols for DOE and its contractors to report tank problems to regulators and stakeholders? Where these protocols followed in the case of recent disclosures and are they adequate? If they are inadequate, how should they be improved?

Please contact David Berick of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources staff if you, or your staff, have any questions concerning this request.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
Chairman