

Lack of skilled workers hampers cleanup

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A declining nuclear workforce is complicating efforts to deal with radioactive waste threatening Washington State's Columbia River.

The massive project to clean up a Cold War-era nuclear weapons plant has met with one setback after another since it started more than a decade ago, the Los Angeles Times reports.

Academic experts agree the U.S. is losing its expertise in nuclear engineering, which is one of the reasons there have been so many problems with the project.

Known as the Hanford site, it is the most polluted in North America and a top clean-up priority of the U.S. Energy Department.

Unfortunately efforts to build a sophisticated waste treatment complex to transform the radioactive sludge have foundered because of engineering mistakes and runaway costs.

Lead contractor Bechtel Corp, the third firm brought in to do the job, says it underestimated how much U.S. expertise in nuclear engineering has atrophied and how difficult it is to find people with the required skills.

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