

Savannah River Site Watch Revamps Website, Challenges NNSA's Reuse of MOX Building as "Plutonium Bomb Plant"

Group Urges Armed Services to Reject Expanded Plutonium "Pit" Production for Nuclear Weapons, Investigate Plutonium Fuel (MOX) Project at Savannah River Site

COLUMBIA, SC, US, September 9, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The public interest non-profit group Savannah River Site Watch (SRS Watch) has launched its new website - www.srswatch.org - in order to better communicate to the public about activities at the Department of Energy's sprawling Savannah River Site (SRS) nuclear complex, located near Aiken, South Carolina.



Savannah River Site Watch

SRS Watch is a non-profit organization working on sound policies and projects by the U.S. Department of Energy

With its reworked website, SRS Watch will renew its focus on a cleaner, sustainable future for SRS and against DOE's proposed "Plutonium Bomb Plant" (PBP), which would make plutonium "pits" (or cores) for unjustified new U.S. nuclear weapons. A new pit plant would yield additional nuclear and chemical waste streams and result in more plutonium import, negatively impacting clean-up of SRS, according to SRS Watch.

“

Congress must decisively act to halt a new nuclear arms race with Russia and reject funding and authorization for the proposed Plutonium Bomb Plant at DOE's Savannah River Site in South Carolina.”

*Tom Clements, Director,
Savannah River Site Watch,
Columbia, SC*

SRS Watch sent a [letter dated August 27, 2019](#) to key members of the Armed Services Committees requesting that the House version of the defense bill, which does not authorize or fund the Plutonium Bomb Plant, be adopted by Congress. The House language would eliminate the requirement from 2015 that NNSA pursue production of 80 or more plutonium pits per year, with 50 or more slated for production at SRS and 30 or more at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico.

SRS houses 35 million gallons of hard-to-manage high-level nuclear waste left over from production of nuclear weapons materials during the Cold War and stores about 11 metric tons of surplus weapon-grade plutonium, for which disposition remains a challenge.

The Plutonium Bomb Plant proposed by DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) remains unfunded and unauthorized by Congress. Many individuals and groups commented in response to a recent solicitation by NNSA on negative environmental, cost and proliferation impacts of expanded pit production. (Comments of SRS Watch in support of the "no action alternative" - no new pit plant - are [linked here](#).)

The status of any new pit facility, which would make the plutonium cores of nuclear weapons, is now the subject of negotiations in a “conference committee” between the U.S. House and Senate Armed Services Committees over their differing versions of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (NDAA).

“Congress must act with fiscal responsibility and in the national security interest and reject the unjustified expansion of plutonium pit production for new nuclear weapons,” said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. “We soundly oppose location of a dirty and risky Plutonium Bomb Plant at SRS, which would deter from site clean-up, stimulate a nuclear arms race with Russia and chart a dangerous future course for the site,” said Clements.



Terminated Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility (MFFF) at DOE's Savannah River Site in South Carolina, special to SRSW by High Flyer

“Give the steady erosion of arms control efforts with Russia, exemplified by the misguided termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, provocative steps like pursuit of a new pit facility must be halted,” added Clements.

SRS has never produced pits, which involves casting of liquid plutonium into hollow spheres for new nuclear weapons. Such a project would bring great cost, schedule and technical risks. Los Alamos is authorized to produce 20 pits per year but has faced monumental problems in recent years in handling plutonium and has generally failed in efforts to produce new pits.

Over 15,000 pits from retired nuclear weapons are in storage at DOE's Pantex site in Texas and reuse of those pits must be considered, according to SRS Watch. Most of those pits were made at DOE's Rocky Flats site, located near Denver, Colorado. The facility halted operation in 1989 but is still faced with extensive plutonium contamination due to inadequate clean-up. “People near SRS do not want a repeat at the site of the Rocky Flats plutonium nightmare,” according Clements.

NNSA has proposed “repurposing” of the partially constructed Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility (MFFF) at SRS for pit production. The MOX project was terminated in 2018 after over \$5 billion was wasted on the mismanaged project. NNSA has failed to make a case that the MOX building, which is fraught with construction problems, could be converted to pit production.

In its letter to Armed Services, SRS Watch called for investigations into fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement with the MOX debacle. SRS Watch argues that both DOE and NNSA and contractors must be held accountable for the bungled project and a formal “lessons learned” report about why the project failed must be publicly released.

The group also called on Armed Services to require a report on the alleged need for the “W87-1-like” warhead, a new warhead for which new pits would be manufactured. Likewise, SRS Watch requested that a “nuclear proliferation risk assessment” be required on the deployment of such a provocative, new warhead. NNSA has so far refused to prepare either document.

Allied with fellow groups in the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability (ANA), a coalition of public interest groups located near many of DOE sites nationwide, SRS Watch will participate in on-going joint efforts to halt the Plutonium Bomb Plant.

SRS Watch will also continue to work with German organizations and officials against a scheme to process and dump at SRS highly radioactive spent fuel from Germany. The irradiated fuel, in the form of uranium-impregnated graphite spheres, was used in the long-closed experimental AVR and THTR gas-cooled reactors. The spent fuel is currently stored at facilities in Jülich (operated by Jülicher Entsorgungsgesellschaft für Nuklearanlagen - JEN) and Ahaus. NNSA has determined that leaving the material in Germany poses no proliferation risk. Under German law its export is illegal and any move to ship it to SRS will face challenges in Germany and the European Union.

By searching for "Plutonium Bomb Plant" or "MOX" or "Germany" on the new SRS Watch website a host of information on the issues above will be found.

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