Challenges Facing Host of Savannah River Site Projects in 2021; DOE Must Strive for More Openness, Better Outreach

In 2021, the U.S. Department of Energy's Savannah River Site faces many challenges with nuclear waste and nuclear weapons projects but progress is possible.

COLUMBIA, SC, USA, January 14, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Proposed and Unjustified SRS Plutonium Bomb Plant (PBP), to Fill the Plutonium Fuel (MOX) Money Hole, to be Opposed and Formally Reviewed in 2021, Termination Possible

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

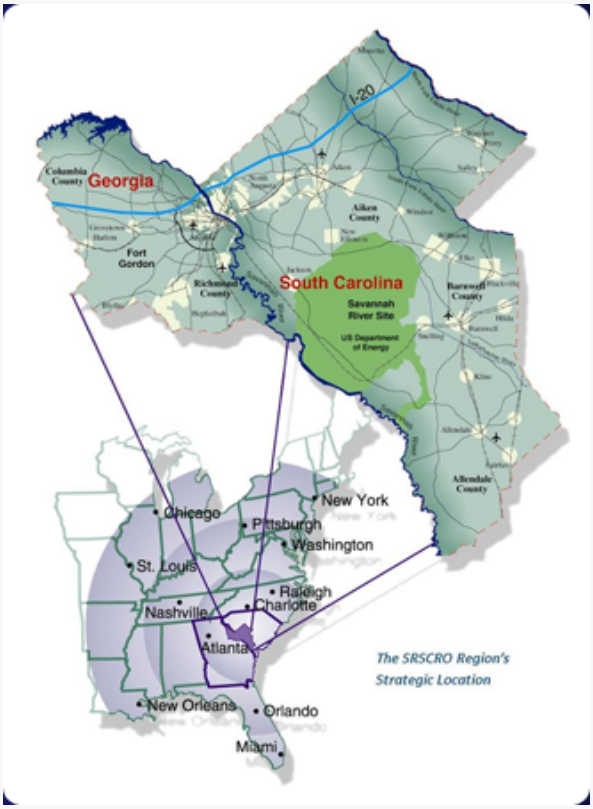
The Savannah River Site faces import of over 50 metric tons of plutonium for three projects: 1) plutonium disposition (via "dilute & dispose"), 2) plutonium pit production for old and new nuclear warheads, and 3) fabrication of fuel for the ill-conceived Versatile Test Reactor (VTR). The VTR lacks congressional support and the Plutonium Bomb Plant is in trouble and facing growing opposition both in Congress and by public interest and arms control groups and may be terminated. We will be attentive that more plutonium does not get stranded at SRS (on top of the 11.5 metric tons now stored in the old K-Reactor).

> Along with better public interaction, the focus at DOE's Savannah River Site in 2021 must remain on clean-up of nuclear waste and resources must not be diverted to the unneeded Plutonium Bomb Plant."
>
> *Tom Clements, Director, Savannah River Site Watch, Columbia, South Carolina*

Citizen engagement on projects at the Department of Energy's Savannah River Site - located near Aiken, South Carolina - began in earnest in the mid-1970s. Despite misguided efforts by DOE and its contractors, a host of ill-conceived projects have been terminated, with great cost savings to the tax payer, avoided waste burden at the site and strengthened national security. (See SRS Watch list of impressive public victories from the 1970s through 2020.) Such successes can be repeated in

2021.

As we enter 2021, numerous programs at SRS face scrutiny as a new Congress takes over and a new administration implements new policies. The lack of openness by DOE and its National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and the hostile attitude toward the public, long a debilitating problem with DOE, again will face challenges by public interest groups. Of primary importance, DOE and SRS must operate in a more democratic and transparent manner. Savannah River Site Watch, along with colleague groups near DOE sites in the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability (ANA) - https://ananuclear.org/ - will renew efforts to hold DOE accountable and will work with new DOE officials in the development of sound policies.



Savannah River Site is located in South Carolina, across the river from Georgia. SRS operated 5 nuclear reactors and produced over 36 metric tons of weapon-grade plutonium, seprated in two reprocessing plants, producing a vast amount of high-level nuclear waste.

Here's a snapshot by Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch (https://srswatch.org/), of some issues facing the Savannah River Site and DOE in 2021 - for the 4-page discussion of these issues click on this link to the SRS Watch website:

1. Proposed, unjustified SRS Plutonium Bomb Plant (PBP), to make plutonium pits for nuclear warheads, will get a thorough review in 2021 by DOE, NNSA and Congress. Expanded pit production at the troubled Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), presented with a straight face by DOE as the "plutonium center of excellence," will continue to be challenged.

2. Investigations into the mismanaged plutonium fuel (MOX) project at SRS are still urgently needed by DOE, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Congress, which has failed to carry out its constitutional oversight power.

3. Review of need for new nuclear weapons, including the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (W87-1 warhead) and a submarine-launched ballistic missile (W93 warhead) and DOE and Department of Defense (DOD) support facilities will be conducted. A New Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan will be prepared but a plan not influenced by the military-industrial complex is needed.

4. Processing of radioactive tritium gas at SRS, for nuclear weapons, will increase in 2021, bringing safety, health and security risks. Tritium rods (TPBARs) are made by

WesDyne/Westinghouse Government Services at the dual-use Westinghouse uranium fuel plant near Columbia, SC - which agency regulates TPBAR fabrication and waste streams remains a mystery - and the rods are irradiated in TVA's Watts Bar Nuclear Bomb Reactors in Tennessee and taken to SRS for processing.

Abandoned plutonium fuel (MOX) building, courtesy High Flyer to SRS Watch. Being considered for the unjustified SRS Plutonium Bomb Plant (PBP). The PBP would mean at least 7.5 metric tons of plutonium shipped to SRS, on top of 50 MT for plutonium disposition & VTR fuel.

5. Processing at SRS of surplus weapons plutonium for disposal as waste is now undergoing a review under the National Environmental Policy Act. Capacity of the DOE's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) underground facility in New Mexico is "oversubscribed" due to this project and transuranic (TRU) waste from pit production and the VTR.

6. Plutonium fuel fabrication at SRS for the proposed, unneeded Versatile Test Reactor (VTR) could bring 30 metric tons of plutonium to SRS. Planning for the "Virtual" Test Reactor is on shaky ground could be terminated. Comments are now being received on the draft EIS on the project.

7. Questions about the impacts of a recent cyberattack on DOE have gone unanswered by SRS and DOE headquarters.

8. SRS has failed to clarify the status of start-up of the Salt Waste Processing Facility (SWPF), to process high-level nuclear waste out of the SRS waste tanks. That must change in 2021.

9. Plans by the Savannah River National Lab (SRNL) and the Jülicher Entsorgungsgesellschaft für Nuklearanlagen (JEN) to import to SRS and dump German highly radioactive spent fuel - from the long-closed commercial gas-cooled reactors AVR (Forschungszentrum Jülich) and THTR (spent fuel now at Ahaus) - are in trouble but remain alive and must be terminated.

10. Clean-up of nuclear and chemical waste at SRS remains the king of employment. A SRS document frem the 4th quarter of Fiscal Year 2020, obtained by SRS Watch via a FOIA request, confirms over 11,000 people employed at SRS but that number will fall as waste tanks are closed by 2030, freeing funding for safer, environmentally sound projects elsewhere.

11. Efforts to dump 1300 vitrified high-level waste canisters - from the Defense Waste Processing

Facility, DWPF - by 2029 as low-level waste or transuranic waste is misguide and will fail. High-level nuclear waste must be disposed of in a geologic facility, the pursuit of which must be renewed.

12. Spent fuel from the Finnish research reactor FiR is likely now on its way from Finland to the Idaho National Lab on the UK-flagged PNTL vessel Pacific Grebe, from the port of Vuosaari, Finland to the port of Savannah, Georgia.

13. Finally and significantly, DOE's "public affairs" office (we can't verify that such exists) and the SRS Office of External Affairs have failed in providing the public with information and responding to public requests. This must change when new officials are appointed at DOE, including at DOE HQ, the NNSA and DOE's Office of Environmental Management (EM).

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