



Savannah River Site Watch

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For Immediate Release

April 14, 2015

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22 Public Interest Groups Request DOE Prepare a “Nuclear Nonproliferation Assessment” on New Technique being developed at Savannah River Site to Reprocess German Spent Fuel

DOE Ignoring Proliferation Risks Inherent in New Reprocessing Method for Graphite Spent Fuel?

[*group letter to DOE & NNSA linked here*](#)

Columbia, South Carolina -- Environmental and nuclear non-proliferation public interest organizations today requested of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) that a nuclear proliferation assessment be prepared on a new reprocessing technique being developed to reprocess German commercial spent nuclear fuel at the Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina.

The groups’ letter to Secretary of Energy Moniz and Administrator Frank Klotz of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) points out the new reprocessing method being developed by Savannah River National Laboratory (SRNL) holds proliferation risks that must be formally reviewed in a “nuclear nonproliferation impact assessment.” DOE has so far for unknown reasons refused to prepare such an essential assessment.

DOE’s Office of Environmental Management (EM) has an agreement with German entities to review import and “disposition” of graphite commercial spent fuel from two long-closed gas-cooled reactors - the AVR and THTR reactors. The spent fuel is in the form of 900,000 hard-to-reprocess graphite spheres, stored in 457 “CASTOR” casks in two facilities (in Juelich, and Ahaus, Germany). If the new reprocessing technique were to work, DOE would consider importing the spent fuel to remove uranium, with high-level nuclear waste streams likely to go into the aging waste tanks at SRS.

Groups signing the letter include key conservation and public interest groups in South Carolina: - Conservation Voters of SC, SC Coastal Conservation League, Upstate Forever and the League of Women Voters of SC - important nuclear non-proliferation organizations: Arms Control Association, the Nonproliferation Policy Education Center and the International Panel on Fissile Materials - as well as groups that work around DOE sites, including Nuclear Watch of New Mexico and Savannah River Site Watch.

“DOE must fully review the nuclear proliferation risks in the new reprocessing technique being developed at SRS and lack of such an assessment would comprise a breakdown in sound nuclear nonproliferation policies,” said Tom Clements, director of Savannah River Site Watch, a public interest organization monitoring activities at SRS. “Any time a new technology is developed that holds proliferation risks it must be thoroughly reviewed from a nuclear nonproliferation perspective and the new reprocessing method being developed for the German spent fuel is a perfect example of technology needing such a review.”

The groups point out that neither EM nor NNSA have taken the initiative to prepare the proliferation assessment and that “given the proliferation implications associated with any reprocessing method, defined as removal of uranium and/or plutonium from spent fuel, it is imperative that DOE immediately prepare a publicly available nuclear nonproliferation impact assessment on the reprocessing of the German graphite spent fuel.”

DOE is currently preparing a “draft environmental assessment” (EA) on certain environmental aspects of the spent fuel import proposal. The release of that document, which has been postponed monthly since December 2014, could take place at any time or its release could be canceled. SRS Watch has been informed by DOE that no proliferation assessment has been prepared by either EM or NNSA along with the draft environmental assessment.

A 45-day public comment period and a public meeting, likely in N. Augusta, South Carolina, will be held if the “draft environmental assessment” is released. The draft EA will be used to determine if a full “environmental impact assessment” will be prepared and is not the decision-making document on the proposal under review. At a public comment meeting held on June 24, a majority of the public opposed the import plan.

It also appears that the US may not have prepared its own legal analysis about the export of the spent fuel from Germany but instead has relied on the opinion of contacts in Germany. Two assessments prepared in Germany say that export of any of the spent fuel is illegal under German law, especially for reprocessing, and a third assessment prepared for the state of North Rhine-Westfalia (where the spent fuel is stored at two locations) says that it is illegal to export the bulk of the spent fuel. SRS Watch has filed a Freedom of Information Act request for any legal assessment prepared by DOE.

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Notes:

1. Group letter to DOE requesting “nuclear proliferation impact assessment” (NPISA), April 14, 2015
http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/group_letter_for_npia_on_reprocessing_technique_for_german_spent_fuel_april_2015.pdf

2. SRS Watch Freedom of Information Act request for US legal analysis of legality of importing German commercial spent fuel for reprocessing and storage, April 4, 2015 – export of commercial spent fuel from Germany and export of spent fuel for reprocessing is against German law but has the US conducted its own analysis of German law or merely relied on biased German entities to provide such analysis?
http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/foia_for_german_legal_analyses_4.4.2015.pdf

3. NNSA letter to SRS Watch, January 21, 2015, confirming that NNSA's Office of Nonproliferation has not prepared a proliferation assessment on the reprocessing technique being developed for the German spent fuel; SRS Watch was informed via an email from SRS on October 30, 2014 that "DOE [EM] does not perform such assessments."

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/foia_15-00056-h_response_no_prolif_assessment_jan_21_2015.pdf

4. DOE June 4, 2014 Federal Register notice announcing preparation of a "draft environmental assessment" – "Environmental Assessment for the Acceptance and Disposition of Used Nuclear Fuel Containing U.S.-Origin Highly Enriched Uranium From the Federal Republic of Germany":

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-06-04/pdf/2014-12933.pdf>

5. SRS Watch comments against bringing the spent fuel to SRS, at June 24, 2014 public "scoping meeting" on DOE's environmental assessment: "Savannah River Site Faces Unprecedented Import of Highly Radioactive Spent Nuclear Fuel from Two German Nuclear Power Reactors; Export from Germany Illegal and Unwarranted":

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/comments_on_illegal_german_nuke_waste_import_to_srs_june_24_2014.pdf

6. SRS Watch powerpoint presentation used in tour of Germany in September 2014 – clarified to German audiences and politicians that SRS is not a disposition site for spent fuel, as DOE has misinformed German entities:

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/presentation_two_srs_watch_for_germany_22_september_2014.pptx

7. Article in German media about the possibility of legal action against the export proposal, April 10, 2015: "Export der Jülicher Atomkugeln in die USA scheint rechtlich nicht durchsetzbar Ahaus als Alternative"

<http://www.wn.de/Muensterland/1939277-Export-der-Juelicher-Atomkugeln-in-die-USA-scheint-rechtlich-nicht-durchsetzbar-Ahaus-als-Alternative>

8. Article in Germany, April 14, 2015 – "Castor-Transporte aus Jülich in die USA endlich vom Tisch?" ("Is CASTOR Transport to the USA Finally Off the Table?")

[http://www.scharf-links.de/42.0.html?&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=50939&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=56&cHash=e56649e43d](http://www.scharf-links.de/42.0.html?&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=50939&tx_ttnews[backPid]=56&cHash=e56649e43d)

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