

WHAT HAPPENED? – On March 29, 2016, the Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration (DOE/NNSA) issued a Record of Decision (ROD) to implement its Preferred Alternative to prepare 6 metric tons (MT) of surplus non-pit plutonium for disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, New Mexico. The surplus plutonium would be prepared for disposal using the unique capabilities of the Savannah River Site (SRS) near Aiken, South Carolina. The 6 MT of surplus plutonium in the ROD includes all plutonium that has been sent to SRS from foreign countries.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT? – This ROD allows DOE/NNSA to continue its progress on the disposition of surplus weapons usable plutonium by establishing a clear, systematic course to ultimately remove 6 MT of surplus plutonium from the State of South Carolina for final disposal at WIPP. In addition, by providing a disposition pathway for foreign plutonium brought to SRS, it supports one of the core missions of DOE/NNSA, securing vulnerable nuclear materials. The importance of keeping nuclear materials out of the hands of terrorists is clearer today than ever and is essential to protecting our Nation and allies. Since 1996, DOE/NNSA has removed or secured more than 5 tons of highly enriched uranium and plutonium from more than 40 countries.

SOUTH CAROLINA’S VITAL ROLE – South Carolina plays a vital role in our efforts to reduce the threat of nuclear terrorism by supporting the safe and secure handling of nuclear materials and preparing them for disposal. The uniquely qualified, highly trained workforce at SRS are among the foremost experts at handling this unique mission. The SRS community performs an invaluable service that is not currently possible anywhere else in the world.

NEXT STEPS (PREPARATION) – As part of the DOE/NNSA’s disposition plan for this material, the unique capabilities and expertise at SRS will be used to dilute the material. This will require the installation of new equipment at the site. It also will require SRS to expand its highly trained workforce.

LATER (DISPOSAL) – The Department remains committed to preparing and removing plutonium from the State of South Carolina. After dilution, the 6 MT of plutonium can be disposed of at WIPP, a proven process that previously has been used in emplacing the nearly 5 MT of surplus plutonium currently at WIPP. As the ROD explains, the surplus plutonium identified in this decision will be packaged to meet the WIPP waste acceptance criteria and all applicable regulatory requirements.