

**Savannah River Site Watch – South Carolina Chapter of the Sierra Club –
League of Women Voters of South Carolina**

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**Public Interest, Conservation Groups Oppose Effort by New Company to Consolidate Commercial
Spent Nuclear Fuel from South Carolina Reactors at Location Near the Savannah River Site**

Columbia, SC – Public interest and conservation groups in South Carolina have joined together to voice opposition to a fledgling, unprecedented proposal to consolidate highly radioactive spent fuel from in-state nuclear reactors at a single location near the Savannah River Site.

The groups have become aware of an effort by a newly incorporated company called Spent Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing Group (SFR Group) to pursue licensing of spent fuel storage at the S.C. Advanced Technology Park on the eastern boundary of the U.S. Department of Energy's Savannah River Site. The site is where the old, never-operated Barnwell reprocessing plant is located.

The groups contend that moving spent fuel within the state to a single non-reactor site is unnecessary, would do nothing to solve the nation's long-term spent fuel disposal problem, would pose worker exposure risks and would present a risk of the radioactive material being left for an indefinite period of time at the site of consolidation.

Given that there is no demonstrated need to remove spent fuel from the four nuclear plant sites in South Carolina, the groups believe that the effort to license a consolidated storage facility will face strong public opposition and must be halted.

"Though the spent fuel storage proposal is in its formative stages we believe that it is totally unnecessary and potentially poses a host of environmental and health issues that cause us to vigorously oppose it," said Christ Hall, chair of executive committee of the South Carolina Chapter of the Sierra Club. "We call on Governor Haley and elected officials to ask tough questions about the proposal and inform the public, which grows ever skeptical about nuclear waste disposal in the state, about information gathered about it."

A July 26, 2016 letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission states that "SFR Group will make application to the Commission (NRC) at a later date as requested, for a construction and operating permit or license." The NRC responded in a pro forma manner on September 9 and encouraged the company "to consider holding pre-application meetings" with the NRC before moving forward with a license application. SFR Group has not reached out to the groups now opposing the proposal.

Currently, spent fuel is stored in both pools and on pads near the reactors in "dry casks" at all South Carolina reactor sites. The groups are not aware of any effort by South Carolina Electric & Gas (SCE&G) or Duke Energy, which operate seven reactors between them, to relocate their spent fuel within the state. The U.S. Department of Energy has begun a national effort to consolidate spent fuel, starting with fuel stored at closed reactor sites, but that slow-moving effort has drawn a mixed response.

Spent fuel, according to the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982, must be disposed of in a geologic repository but such a facility does not exist. According to the groups, shuffling the spent fuel around within the state will do nothing to solve the problem of its removal from South Carolina to a repository and could actually reduce pressure on the government and nuclear utilities to develop a long-term, acceptable disposal solution.

Packaging of the spent fuel for transport, unloading it at the consolidated storage site and eventually repackaging it to transport to a federal facility would unnecessarily pose a high economic cost and a

logistical nightmare, both of which can be avoided if the spent fuel is left where it is now stored until such time as a geologic facility is available, according to the groups opposing the proposal.

Suzanne Rhodes of the South Carolina League of Women Voters, a non-partisan organization long-concerned about potential environmental impacts of nuclear waste management, said: "There is no justification whatsoever to consolidate spent fuel at the Barnwell site as it would only increase risks and cost and do nothing to solve the spent fuel crisis that has developed."

On-line records on the SC secretary of state's website show that the SFR Group applied for incorporation on February 2, 2016 and was registered as a for-profit entity. Apart from the name of the individual in whose name the registration was made, Mike Stake - who appears to be affiliated with the Aiken County Tea Party - it is not known if there are other partners with the venture. The rambling nature of the SFR Group letter sent to the NRC suggests that the spent fuel storage concept is not well formulated at this point.

The letter to the NRC also implies that a goal would be to consolidate the spent fuel in order to reprocess it. Reprocessing, which entails removal of weapon-usable plutonium and results in a host of hard to manage nuclear waste streams, is uneconomical and is not being pursued by the United States. Reprocessing at SRS to produce nuclear weapons materials has left an enduring legacy of nuclear waste yet to be cleaned up.

Though its role to advise on environmental matters is confined to the boundaries of SRS, the Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board (SRS CAB) - reflecting public sentiment near SRS - renewed its position on July 26, 2016 to oppose commercial spent fuel storage at SRS.

Notes:

SFR Group letter to NRC, July 26, 2016 to the NRC:

<https://adamswebsearch2.nrc.gov/webSearch2/view?AccessionNumber=ML16245A025>

NRC response to SFR group, September 9, 2016:

<https://adamswebsearch2.nrc.gov/webSearch2/main.jsp?AccessionNumber=ML16245A018>

SRS Citizens Advisory Board "position statement" against interim or long-term commercial spent fuel storage at SRS, renewed July 26, 2016:

<http://www.srs.gov/general/outreach/srs-cab/library/positions/Storage%20of%20Commercial%20Spent%20Nuclear%20Fuel.pdf>

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