



Savannah River Site Watch

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For Immediate Release
December 23, 2015**

DOE Deals Blow to Plutonium Fuel (MOX) Program at Savannah River Site (SRS) by Choosing to Dispose of 6 Metric Tons of Plutonium at SRS as Waste, But Decision Faces Problems

**Federal Register Notice on “Preferred Alternative” Coming on Christmas Eve
– text and link in “notes” below**

Columbia, South Carolina – The U.S. Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) is poised to issue an initial decision to dispose of 6 metric tons of weapon-grade plutonium now stored at the Savannah River site in South Carolina as nuclear waste, according to a preliminary Federal Register notice by DOE.

The decision will come on Thursday, December 24 via a Federal Register notice. The notice will publicize the “preferred alternative” to dispose of 6 metric tons of plutonium now stored at SRS in the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico, via The notice states that “DOE/NNSA may issue a Record of Decision (ROD), containing its decision(s) for disposition of this quantity of material, no sooner than 30 days from the date of publication of this notice in the Federal Register.”

“This decision could be a fatal blow to the mismanaged MOX project at SRS as it will set the precedent that plutonium is waste and not a commercial product to be used as nuclear fuel,” said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch.

“While we have long endorsed disposal of plutonium as waste, the WIPP option faces many challenges and DOE will struggle to carry out this plan,” Clements added. “As the WIPP facility is now closed and may not have the capacity, we still support the option to immobilize plutonium in existing high-level nuclear waste at SRS and urge DOE to immediately renew development of this sensible option.”

With the decision, almost half of the 12.8 metric tons of plutonium in storage in the K Area at SRS would be formally declared waste. It is unclear what will happen with the remaining plutonium at SRS, now designated to go to the DOE’s mismanaged MOX project but that project is under-funded and Congress has placed it on a shut-down track (due to appropriating only \$345 million for the project in Fiscal Year 2016, less than half of what it needs to be viable.

“This decision is the beginning of the end for the tortured MOX project and the poor management of it by DOE, NNSA and the contractor CB&I AEVA MOX Services,” said Clements. “We fully expect that this

decision to dispose of plutonium as waste signals that the DOE's Fiscal Year 2017 budget to be released on February 1, 2016 will request funding to terminate the MOX boondoggle."

Notes:

Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

<http://nnsa.energy.gov/aboutus/ouoperations/generalcounsel/nepaoverview/nepa/spdsupplementaleis>

SRS Watch on more plutonium coming in to SRS, which will complicate all disposition options;

News release of December 21, 2015:

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srs_watch_news_japan_plutonium_december_21_2015.pdf

Report on foreign plutonium import, December 21, 2015:

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srs_watch_plutonium_import_report_december_21_2015.pdf

Federal Register notice of December 24, 2015;

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2015-32440.pdf>

<https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2015/12/24/2015-32440/environmental-impact-statements-availability-etc-preferred-alternative-for-certain-quantities-of>

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Preferred Alternative for Certain Quantities of Plutonium Evaluated in the Final Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

AGENCY: National Nuclear Security Administration, U.S. Department of Energy

ACTION: Notice of Preferred Alternative.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Energy / National Nuclear Security Administration (DOE/NNSA) is announcing its Preferred Alternative for the disposition of certain quantities of surplus plutonium evaluated in the Final Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Final SPD Supplemental EIS) (DOE/EIS-0283-S2, April 2015). Among the potential actions considered in the Final SPD Supplemental EIS, DOE/NNSA analyzed the potential environmental impacts for the disposition of 13.1 metric tons (14.4 tons) of surplus plutonium for which a disposition path is not assigned, including 7.1 metric tons (7.8 tons) of plutonium from pits that were declared excess to national defense needs and 6 metric

tons (6.6 tons) of surplus non-pit plutonium. With regard to the 6 metric tons (MT) of surplus non-pit plutonium, DOE/NNSA's Preferred Alternative is to prepare this plutonium for eventual disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, New Mexico, a geologic repository for disposal of Transuranic (TRU) waste generated by atomic energy defense activities. DOE/NNSA may issue a Record of Decision (ROD), containing its decision(s) for disposition of this quantity of material, no sooner than 30 days from the date of publication of this notice in the Federal Register.

ADDRESSES: A copy of the Final SPD Supplemental EIS may be obtained by contacting: Ms. Sachiko McAlhany, NEPA Document Manager, SPD Supplemental EIS at spdsupplementaleis@leidos.com. The Final SPD Supplemental EIS and its Notice of Availability can be viewed at <http://nnsa.energy.gov/nepa/spdsupplementaleis> or on the DOE NEPA Web site at <http://energy.gov/nepa/nepa-documents>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For Further information on the Final SPD Supplemental EIS, contact Ms. Sachiko McAlhany as listed in ADDRESSES. For general information regarding the DOE NEPA process, contact: Ms. Carol M. Borgstrom, Director, Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance, U.S. Department of Energy, 1000 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20585-0103, Telephone 202-586-4600 or leave a message at 1-800-472-2756, Email: ask NEPA@hq.doe.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background:

In the Final Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DOE/EIS-0283-S2, April 2015), DOE/NNSA analyzed the potential environmental impacts for the No Action Alternative and four action alternatives for disposition of 13.1 metric tons (MT) of surplus plutonium, of which the 6 MT of non-pit plutonium is a subset (Final SPD Supplemental EIS Summary, figure S-7). The four action alternatives that are applicable to the surplus non-pit plutonium are described in section S.9.2 of the Final SPD Supplemental EIS.

The scope of this notice pertains only to the 6 MT of surplus non-pit plutonium for which a disposition path is not assigned. DOE/NNSA has no Preferred Alternative, at this time, for other potential actions considered in the Final SPD Supplemental EIS. Specifically, DOE/NNSA has no Preferred Alternative for the disposition of the remaining 7.1 MT of surplus plutonium from pits, nor does it have a Preferred Alternative among the pathways analyzed for providing the capability to disassemble surplus pits and convert the plutonium from pits to a form suitable for disposition.

Preferred Alternative for Non-Pit Plutonium:

DOE/NNSA's Preferred Alternative with regard to the disposition of 6 MT of surplus non-pit plutonium is to prepare this plutonium for eventual disposal at WIPP in Carlsbad, New Mexico, a geologic repository for disposal of TRU waste generated by atomic energy defense activities. This would allow the DOE/NNSA to continue progress on the disposition of surplus weapon usable plutonium in furtherance of the policies of the United States to ensure that surplus plutonium is never used in a nuclear weapon, and to remove surplus plutonium from the State of South Carolina. Surplus non-pit plutonium would be prepared and packaged at the Savannah River Site (SRS) using H-Canyon /HB-line and/or K-Area facilities to meet the WIPP waste acceptance criteria and all other applicable regulatory requirements and would be temporarily stored in E-Area at SRS until shipped. Shipments of this surplus plutonium to WIPP would not

commence until WIPP is fully operational, and would be placed in the appropriate place in any queue of material to be shipped to WIPP.

Contact:

Tom Clements

Savannah River Site Watch

Columbia, SC

tel. 803-834-3084

srswatch@gmail.com

<http://www.srswatch.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/SavannahRiverSiteWatch>