



Savannah River Site Watch

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**For Immediate Release**

**November 20, 2015**

**Release of Draft Environmental Document Analyzing German Spent Fuel Processing at Savannah River Site Delayed Yet Again; DOE Dodges Substantive Update to SRS CAB on Problematic German Deal**

[Click here for listing of SRS environment documents with confirmation that the draft EA is "undergoing internal review"](#)

Columbia, SC -- The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has once again failed to release of a draft environmental document analyzing the shipment of highly radioactive commercial spent fuel to the Savannah River Site from Germany. The chronic failure to release the environmental document confirms deepening problems with the plan, according to Savannah River Site Watch (SRS Watch).

The "draft environmental analysis" (draft EA) on the reprocessing of the German spent fuel and the dumping of by-product waste in the SRS high-level waste tanks is still "undergoing internal review" according to a schedule of environmental documents sent by SRS on November 19. (The list is dated November 12.)

Likewise, in its November 16 schedule of environmental documents, the DOE's Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance in Washington has removed a target month for release of the document. After being delayed every month since December 2014, DOE continues to postpone the release of the document and flounders in its lack of commitment to terminate the ill-conceived program and inability to go forward with it.

"Given the host of obstacles facing the unprecedented proposal to import German commercial spent fuel to SRS, it is no surprise at all that that release of the environmental document continues to be delayed," said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. "Due to political and technical problems the release of the document remains under endless internal review, which is DOE-speak for admitting that the project teeters on the brink of cancellation."

At the SRS Citizens Advisory Board meeting on November 17, 2015, in New Ellenton, SC, Maxcine Maxted of SRS, in response to a question by a CAB member, was not only unable to give a date for the release of the draft EA but could not report on any new developments on the stalled plan. Ms. Maxted, Spent Nuclear Fuel Program Manager at SRS, could only say that she hoped the draft ES would be released "soon," the same uninformative response given by SRS for many months. Ms. Maxted has been the most prominent backer of the faltering project and all during 2015 she has been unable or

unwilling to give a substantive report about it. She is listed in both the SRS and DOE HQ EA environmental document schedules as being the point of contact for EA.

The German spent fuel in question consists of graphite balls impregnated with uranium from the long-closed AVR gas-cooled reactor, used to commercially generate electricity. That highly radioactive material is now stored in 152 CASTOR casks at the research center in Juelich, Germany, a facility visited by Tom Clements of SRS Watch in July 2015 and September 2014.

On July 21, 2015, Clements, director of SRS Watch met in Bonn, Germany with key German government officials from the German Environment Ministry, the German Ministry of Education and Research and the North Rhine-Westphalia government, the state in which the spent fuel in question is stored. The officials were informed about DOE's failure to prepare key documents, including lack of DOE's own analysis of the legality importing the spent fuel - its export is illegal under German law, according to various German analyses. Also lacking is DOE's nuclear nonproliferation analysis of the new and proliferation-prone reprocessing technique being developed with German financial support by the Savannah River National Lab (SRNL).

Of highest importance, an August 1, 2013 DOE memo - obtained by SRS Watch via a Freedom of Information Act request - revealing that DOE does not believe the spent fuel to be a proliferation risk was also delivered to the German officials. Likewise, the officials were informed that SRS is not a high-level waste disposal site, as DOE has misrepresented in various public documents and presentations.

Of great importance in Germany is that the high-level nuclear waste committee of the German Bundestag (parliament) - the committee making decisions about the way forward with spent fuel and high-level waste disposal - passed a position statement on October 2, 2015 not to export spent fuel from the reactors in question. Though not yet law, that action could have been a death blow to the project.

Rumors from various sources in Germany indicated that the proposal to ship the spent fuel to SRS has been abandoned as German officials now realize both domestic problems with the export and that the SRS option is more complicated than some DOE officials have communicated.

Though SRS Watch has requested in writing in April 2015 of SRS manager Jack Craig that the proposal to dump German spent fuel at SRS be terminated, he has not yet responded. "In spite of DOE's inability to inform the public about details of where the proposal stands, the tide is against the misguided proposal and it's just a matter of time before DOE either gracefully cancels it or allows it to wither on the vine," said Clements.

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#### **Notes:**

**1. SRS list of current environmental documents, with edit on July 31, 2015 on status of "draft Environmental Assessment" on import of German spent fuel - note language: "*Draft EA undergoing internal review.*"**

[http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/doe-sr\\_nepa\\_oct\\_status\\_report\\_12nov15 - approved for public release-2.pdf](http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/doe-sr_nepa_oct_status_report_12nov15_approved_for_public_release-2.pdf)

*EA for the Acceptance and Disposition of Used Nuclear Fuel Containing U.S.-Origin Highly Enriched Uranium from the Federal Republic of Germany, DOE/EA-1977SR POCs: Maxcine Maxted, Nuclear Material Programs Division Tracy Williams, EQMDEM POC: Hitesh Nigam, EM-22GC POC: Carrie Abravanel, GC-54(<http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2014/06/f16/EA-1977-NOI-2014.pdf>)*

*DOE has announced its intent to prepare an EA to analyze the potential environmental impacts from a proposed project to accept spent nuclear fuel from the Federal Republic of Germany at SRS for processing and disposition. This spent nuclear fuel is composed of kernels containing thorium and U.S.-origin highly enriched uranium embedded in small graphite spheres that were irradiated in nuclear reactors used for research and development purposes. **The draft EA is undergoing internal review.***

**2. Listing by DOE's Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance on November 16, 2015 includes no date for release of the German draft EA. In the past, target months for the document's release were listed, see page 21:**

[http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2015/11/f27/StatusChart\\_November2015.pdf](http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2015/11/f27/StatusChart_November2015.pdf)

**3. SRS Watch news release of July 1, 2015, releasing secret DOE memo dated August 1, 2013 that states there is no proliferation risk if the AVR spent fuel remains in Germany; links to key documents are in "notes" in news release:**

[http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srsw\\_news\\_on\\_no\\_proliferation\\_risk\\_of\\_avr\\_spent\\_fuel\\_july\\_1\\_2015.pdf](http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srsw_news_on_no_proliferation_risk_of_avr_spent_fuel_july_1_2015.pdf)

**4. DOE memo of August 1, 2013, released by SRS Watch via the news release above – confirming that there is no proliferation risk if the AVR spent fuel remains in Germany – memo shared with German officials; this is the memo that may well be the nail in the coffin of the scheme:**

[http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/doe\\_memo\\_on\\_no\\_proliferation\\_risk\\_of\\_avr\\_spent\\_fuel\\_august\\_1\\_2013.pdf](http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/doe_memo_on_no_proliferation_risk_of_avr_spent_fuel_august_1_2013.pdf)

**5. SRS Watch news release on German waste commission resolution against export of the spent fuel, November 3, 2015**

[http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srs\\_watch\\_news\\_on\\_avr\\_import\\_problems\\_and\\_foia\\_documents\\_nov\\_3\\_2015.pdf](http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srs_watch_news_on_avr_import_problems_and_foia_documents_nov_3_2015.pdf)

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