Savannah River Site Watch

Savannah River Site Watch
Columbia, South Carolina USA
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U.S. Department of Energy Quietly Gearing Up to Bring 331 Kilograms of Plutonium in Japan to Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina with No Exit Path Out of the State

Import being Pursued in Advance of Nuclear Security Summit in March 2016 Includes 236 Kg of UK-Origin Plutonium that Should Not Go to SRS Given Struggles with Plutonium Fuel (MOX) Program

In Report Released Today, SRS Watch Calls on State of South Carolina to Oppose UK Plutonium to SRS:

DOE'S SOUTH CAROLINA PLUTONIUM DILEMMA:
PLUTONIUM KEEPS SECRETLY COMING IN BUT NO VIABLE PLAN TO TAKE IT OUT

Columbia, South Carolina – Under a guise of nuclear non-proliferation, the U.S Department of Energy has quietly initiated a confidential process by which a large amount of foreign-owned plutonium in Japan would be brought to the DOE's Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina, according to the public interest group Savannah River Site Watch (SRS Watch).

In a DOE environmental schedule of December 16, DOE reveals that it authorized the preparation of a document entitled "**Environmental Assessment [EA] for Gap Material Plutonium - Transport, Receipt, and Processing**" on October 30, 2015. This document is in secret analyzing shipment of 331 kilograms of plutonium in Japan to SRS. (*see link to this schedule in report linked above and in "notes" below*)

The effort to import foreign-owned plutonium now at the Fast Critical Assembly (FCA) in Japan is being undertaken now so that it can be promoted at the Nuclear Security Summit in March 2016 in Washington, D.C. Efforts to package the plutonium may have already begun, but SRS Watch has not been able to confirm this.

Despite growing concern in South Carolina about the unknown fate of 12.8 metric tons of plutonium already stored at SRS, the additional 331 kilograms (730 pounds) of plutonium in Japan, originally supplied by the United Kingdom, United States and France, could be added to the SRS plutonium stockpile and stranded with no disposition path out of the site. The bulk of the plutonium, 236 kilograms (520 pounds), is of origin in the United Kingdom and no known disposition path would exist for the material if taken to SRS, according to SRS Watch.

"We regard import of U.K.-origin and French-origin plutonium to SRS to simply be nuclear dumping as each of those nuclear weapons states have dedicated plutonium-storage facilities to which their material could be taken," said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. "As DOE is struggling to come up with a plan to manage plutonium already stored at SRS, any import of U.K. and French plutonium would be a hollow non-proliferation accomplishment at the upcoming Nuclear Security Summit. Due to nuclear proliferation concerns, we acknowledge that the U.S. does have an obligation to deal with plutonium it has shipped abroad but other nuclear weapons states must deal with their own plutonium and it must not be taken to SRS," added Clements.

It appears that a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) has already been sent to the states of South Carolina and Georgia for comment. DOE has withheld the document from the public, is not allowing public comment and likely does not intend to prepare a more comprehensive "environmental impact statement" (EIS). SRS Watch believes that an EIS is required under U.S. environmental law given the significance of adding a large amount of plutonium to the SRS stockpile. SRS Watch is submitting its "DOE's Plutonium Dilemma" report to DOE, for the EA record, and to the State of South Carolina to help inform comments on the draft EA.

Japan's Atomic Energy Commission has publicly revealed that 331 kilograms (730 pounds) of foreign-origin plutonium are now stored at the Fast Critical Assembly at the Tokai Research and Development Center. The U.S. and Japanese governments stated in 2014 the goal to remove this material. Sources in Japan report that approximately 236 kilograms (520 pounds) of the plutonium are of U.K.-origin, 93 kilograms (205 pounds) are of U.S.-origin and 2 kilograms (4.5 pounds) are of French-origin. The plutonium was taken to Japan primarily in the 1960s and 1970s, as part of problem-plagued program to develop sodium-cooled plutonium "breeder" reactors.

DOE claims that the plutonium is a proliferation risk in Japan, but according to a recent filing with the International Atomic Energy Agency, Japan already possesses its own domestic stockpile of about 10 metric tons of weapon-usable plutonium (and has about 37 metric tons stockpiled at European reprocessing facilities). Japan continues to pursue a new reprocessing plant at Rokkasho-mura that could separate an unneeded 8 metric tons of plutonium a year from commercial spent fuel.

Bringing the additional plutonium to SRS would further complicate the mismanaged plutonium fuel (MOX) program to dispose of weapons plutonium and undercut efforts by South Carolina to require DOE to meet legal requirements to remove 1 metric ton of plutonium from the state by January 1, 2016, according to SRS Watch.

As Governor Nikki Haley has called on DOE to begin removing plutonium from SRS by January 1, she may be facing a political dilemma if she remains quiet about more plutonium coming in to SRS. "We call on Governor Haley to demand that DOE not bring in plutonium that originated in the United Kingdom or France," said Clements.

In 2010, DOE prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), still being withheld from the public, which analyzed import of 100 kilograms of plutonium to SRS. The new EA is needed to increase the amount of

plutonium to be imported and could address import of up to 1400 kilograms, according to a December 2014 DOE report entitled *GTRI Removal Program Overview* (linked below).

After preparation of the EA in 2010, DOE issued a "Finding of No Significant Impact" (FONSI) - linked below - which allowed the import of up to 100 kilograms of plutonium. It is known that the U.K.-flagged nuclear transport ship Pacific Egret, operated by Pacific Nuclear Transport limited, was used to bring in Italian and Belgian plutonium via Charleston, South Carolina in 2014 and that Swedish plutonium was taken to SRS in 2012. DOE has stated in the GTRI presentation mentioned above it has also identified 81 kilograms of plutonium in Germany, Canada and Switzerland that it could bring to the U.S.

Though transport by sea was discussed in the 2010 FONSI, the document also states that no certified container exists for legal transport via air but that a "national security exemption" could be issued to allow air transport. It is anticipated that any FONSI to be finalized in early 2016 would also include a provision for unprecedented air transport of the 331 kg from Japan to SRS, implying that DOE knows of a security threat facing the material, according to SRS Watch.

SRS Watch believes that a main driver for the proposal to now remove the plutonium from Japan is in order for the U.S. to claim a hollow nuclear non-proliferation "victory" at the Nuclear Security Summit to be held in Washington from March 31-April 1, 2016. At the Nuclear Security Summit in 2014, the US and Japan affirmed efforts to remove foreign-origin plutonium and bomb-grade uranium from the Fast Critical Assembly facility in Japan:

> *Today in The Hague, the Netherlands, on the occasion of the third Nuclear Security Summit, Prime Minister Abe and President Obama pledged to remove and dispose all highly-enriched uranium (HEU) and separated plutonium from the Fast Critical Assembly (FCA) at the Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA) in Japan. … This material, once securely transported to the United States, will be sent to a secure facility and fully converted into less sensitive forms. The plutonium will be prepared for final disposition. The HEU will be downblended to low enriched uranium (LEU) and utilized for civilian purposes.*

Unfortunately, the governmental statement on removal of the plutonium is entirely inaccurate as there is no plan at the Savannah River Site to convert the plutonium into a "less sensitive form" nor is there any viable plan for its "final disposition." The project at SRS to build a $12-billion plutonium fuel (MOX) plant to convert plutonium into fuel is no longer financially viable, according to DOE, and the mismanaged project is in disarray. As the chaotic state of the MOX project means that any plutonium coming into South Carolina has no exit path out, SRS Watch calls on the State of South Carolina to oppose import of foreign plutonium to SRS.

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Notes:

See SRS Watch report ***DOE'S SOUTH CAROLINA PLUTONIUM DILEMMA: PLUTONIUM KEEPS SECRETLY COMING IN BUT NO VIABLE PLAN TO TAKE IT OUT***, December 21, 2015, for details of plan to import plutonium from Japan to the Savannah River Site, with many reference documents linked.

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

Some of the key documents linked in report above

DOE/EA-2024, Environmental Assessment for Gap Material Plutonium - Transport, Receipt, and Processing" – listed in DOE's "National Environmental Policy Act" status chart, December 16, 2015, with listing of "EA Determination 10/30/2015;" and "Transmittal to State(s): SC", page 24: http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2015/12/f27/StatusChart_December2015v2.pdf

White House "Announcement of the Nuclear Security Summit in 2016," August 5, 2015: https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/08/05/announcement-nuclear-security-summit-2016

"Joint Statement by the Leaders of Japan and the United States on Contributions to Global Minimization of Nuclear Material, Nuclear Security Summit, March 24, 2014: https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/24/joint-statement-leaders-japan-and-united-states-contributions-global-min

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Environmental Assessment for the U.S. Receipt and Storage of Gap material – Plutonium, May 26, 2010 - analysis of receipt of up to 100 kilograms of foreign plutonium to the Savannah River site and shipment via air allowed only in case of a "national security exemption" (page iii) as a U.S.-certified air-transport cask for plutonium does not exist: http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/nepapub/nepa_documents/RedDont/EA-1771-FONSI-2010.pdf

Global Threat Reduction Initiative, GTRI Removal Program Overview, December 3, 2014, this is a key document and confirms Belgian and Italian plutonium to SRS and states that 1400 kilograms of "gap" plutonium should be reviewed for import (in a new "environmental assessment') & notes "Potential backlash for increasing inventories at Savannah River when no formal decision on MOX has been announced": http://dels.nas.edu/resources/static-assets/nrsb/miscellaneous/Dickerson.pdf

The Status of Plutonium Management in Japan, 21 July 2015, Secretariat of the Atomic Energy Commission, page 7: "Fast Critical Assembly in Tokai R&D Center," 331 kg total Pu, 293 fissile Pu; http://www.aec.go.jp/jicst/NC/iinkai/teirei/siryo2015/siryo28/siryo3_e.pdf

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Tom Clements
Director, Savannah River Site Watch (SRS Watch)
Columbia, South Carolina USA
http://www.srswatch.org/
https://www.facebook.com/SavannahRiverSiteWatch
tel. 1-803-834-3084
srswatch@gmail.com