Columbia, SC – The U.S. Department of Energy has revealed that a shipment of material from an unnamed university arrived at the Savannah River Site with radioactive contamination. But SRS has failed to say what happened with the material and has yet to respond to questions about it posed by the public interest group Savannah River Site Watch.

An “Occurrence Report” filed by the Savannah River Site on April 10 stated that the unanticipated contamination was on the outside of a 5-gallon bucket as part of a “radiological shipment.” The report, entitled “Contamination Discovered on Inbound Shipment (University Shipment Issue),” stated:

“A radiological shipment was being received at 731-1N Receiving. Upon a survey conducted by radiological control, it revealed excessive contamination levels outside of a five-gallon pail. No spills or leaks were observed. Radiological control placed the five-gallon pail into a bag and the bagged material was placed in the 731-1N RMA. Radiological control surveyed the truck and trailer, and there was no contamination found. The truck was allowed to exit the site.”

The report goes on to state that “immediate actions” were taken: “Radiological control placed the five-gallon pail into a bag and the bagged material was placed in the 731-1N RMA. Radiological control surveyed the truck and trailer, and there was no contamination found. The truck was allowed to exit the site.”

But the report does not reveal key things, such as where the material originated, what the shipment consisted of, how the contamination will be remediated and if such shipments from universities are routine. Questions about the incident posed by Savannah River Site Watch on May 1, 2019 were acknowledged on May 3, 2019 but no answers have been forthcoming. (See questions in “notes” below.)

“Given that this incident involved unanticipated contamination involving a radiological shipment to SRS, it’s incumbent upon the site to reveal details of the incident and how it is being addressed,” said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. “Our inquiry about the incident to SRS has gone unanswered and
response to our questions will help with public understanding of exactly what happened and how such contamination can be avoided in the future."

The incident was also reported by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, via a weekly report dated April 19, 2019 and posted on May 10, 2019:

“SRNS personnel received a shipment for SRNL from a university containing nuclear material. Upon receipt, SRNS personnel found contamination on outside of the shipping container and stopped and made the appropriate notifications. SRNL’s investigation revealed some imprecise communication between SRNL and the university. The contamination occurred prior to shipping this material back to SRNL.”

Notes:

DOE’s Occurrence Report on the April 10, -019 incident - EM-SR--SRNS-MOGEN-2019-0001:

https://orpspublic.doe.gov/orps/reports/displayReport2.asp?crypt=%87%C3%95%9Ba%8Evat%5D%92

Link to “Final ORPS” -U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY - Occurrence Reporting and Processing System:

https://data.doe.gov/MS/asp/Main.aspx#

DNFSB Weekly Report, April 19, 2019

https://www.dnfsb.gov/sites/default/files/document/18016/Savannah%20River%20Week%20Ending%20April%202019%202019.pdf

Questions posed to DOE by SRS Watch on May 1, 2019, receipt acknowledged on May 3, 2019 but no response as of May 10, 2019:

1. What did the radiological shipment consist of?
2. What was in the 5-gallon bucket which was determined to have external radiation?
3. What was the origin of the external contamination?
4. Which university shipped the material in question?
5. Was the university informed by SRS about the situation and what has been the university’s response about the contamination discovered on arrival of the shipment at SRS?
6. How will the radiological shipment and the 5-gallong bucket be handled and disposed of, including the disposal site(s)?

7. Why is this university material being received at SRS? Under what agreement with the university in question or other universities is this material being received?

8. Will there be any form of investigation or “lessons learned” report or assessment about this shipment?

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**SRS Information on receipt of materials 731-N**


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“THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NUCLEAR MATERIALS DISPOSITION PATHWAYS TO ACHIEVE INTERNATIONAL NONPROLIFERATION OBJECTIVES, 2014” – mentions receipt of research reactor spent fuel MIT and University of Missouri reactors; SRS also receives spent fuel from Univ. of Alberta