



**Savannah River Site Watch
For Immediate Release
December 17, 2018**

Contact: Tom Clements, 803-834-3084, cell 803-240-7268, srswatch@gmail.com

DOE Files “Second Progress Report” with Federal District Court on Unjustified Removal of 1 Metric Ton of Plutonium from Savannah River Site - to Nevada or Texas; DOE Confirms Obstacles and Problems with Shipment, Including Increased Radiation Exposure to Workers & State of Nevada Legal Challenge

Columbia, South Carolina – The U.S. Department of Energy has filed with the federal district court in Columbia, South Carolina a second report on controversial efforts to remove a court-mandated 1 metric ton of plutonium from DOE’s Savannah River Site.

In the report, DOE reveals problems face the unjustified packaging and shipment. The public interest group Savannah River Site Watch maintains that the shipment is unnecessary and poses security, environmental and health risks and is a waste of financial resources and should not take place.

The “Second Progress Report” on plutonium removal was filed with the court on December 14, 2018. The report affirms that packaging and shipping the plutonium for “staging” at DOE sites in Nevada (Nevada National Security Site) and/or Texas (Pantex) will causes “additional radiation exposure to workers.”

Further, DOE confirms in the report that the State of Nevada filed a complaint in federal court on November 30, 2018, seeking to halt the shipment and that the state claims that DOE has not complied with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). For its part, DOE maintains that the “supplement analysis” prepared by the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) in July 2018 meets the requirements of NEPA.

SRS Watch believes that a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must be prepared on the matter, with opportunity for public comments by citizens in all the impacted states, if DOE moves forward with its wrong-headed shipment plan.

“As this shipment is totally unnecessary and poses a host of security and environmental risks, we are hopeful that the legal challenge in Nevada will be successful,” said Tom Clements, director of the public interest group Savannah River Site Watch. “Preparing to ship the plutonium from SRS simply to please a federal judge in Columbia, SC is an irresponsible exercise; the plutonium in question should remain in secure storage at SRS,” add Clements.

DOE makes the dubious assertion that it will need the 1 MT of plutonium for production of plutonium “pits” for nuclear weapons, either at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico or at another site. Yet, in addition to Pantex already storing over 15,000 pits removed from nuclear weapons, DOE has failed to prepare the legally required Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) on expanded pit production at Los Alamos and/or SRS. On October 31, 2018, three member groups of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability (ANA) - Nuclear Watch New Mexico, Tri-Valley Cares and SRS Watch – wrote to NNSA about the need to prepare that document. (See group news release: http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/news_nnsa_pits_peis_10-31-18.pdf)

In the report, DOE confirms that packaging the 1 MT of plutonium for shipment has negatively impacted the “downblending” of plutonium at SRS. DOE currently has authority to downblend 6 MT of the 13 MT of plutonium stored at SRS in the old K-Reactor for transport to be dumped in the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico.

DOE concludes in the report that it “remains confident that it will be able to meet the Court’s deadline of January 1, 2012” to remove the plutonium from SRS.

The State of South Carolina brought the case for the removal of the plutonium as a last-ditch effort to try and force DOE to continue with the bungled project to make nuclear fuel (MOX) out of surplus weapon plutonium at SRS. Now that DOE has terminated construction of the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility (MFFF), with congressional and federal court approval, any spurious reason to now remove plutonium from SRS has totally vanished, according to SRS Watch.

###

Notes:

Second Progress Report on removal of plutonium from SRS, filed with federal district court on December 14, 2018

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/plutonium_removal_progress_report_dec_14_2018.pdf

Notice of Filing of Second Progress Report, December 14, 2018

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/cover_to_report_dec_14_2018.pdf

NNSA’s “Supplement Analysis for the Removal of One Metric ton of Plutonium from the State of South Carolina to Nevada, Texas, and New Mexico,” July 2018:

https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2018/08/f55/DOE%20EIS-0236-S4-SA-01_July%202018.pdf

SRS Watch on line: www.srswatch.org & <https://www.facebook.com/SavannahRiverSiteWatch>