



Savannah River Site Watch

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**For Immediate Release**

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**Initial DOE Decision Expected on New Nuclear Bomb Plant; "Pit" Production Plant at Savannah River Site would Lead to More Plutonium and Nuclear, Toxic Waste at SRS & Magnify Risks of Arms Race**

**DOE likely to Name Soon-to-be-Terminated MOX Building at SRS a Lead Contender for "Pit" Job; DOE System-Wide "Environmental Impact Statement" Required to Review Options and their Impacts**

Columbia, SC – The U.S. Department of Energy is set to deliver to Congress a controversial report on the siting of new factories to produce plutonium components for nuclear weapons. The report could name the DOE's Savannah River Site as a target for one of the factories, which would produce the plutonium "pits" - also called cores or triggers - central to individual U.S. nuclear weapons.

DOE is required by law to deliver an "analysis" on pit production to the Armed Services Committees of Congress by May 11 that would recommend alternatives for pit production capacity. It is not known how the committees will release the information submitted by DOE. Congress has not yet decided to fund any new pit plant(s).

It is believed that the analysis will focus on pit-production options at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, which now has limited pit-production capacity, and the Savannah River Site, which has never produced pits. Indications are that DOE could locate capacity to make up to 30 pits per year at Los Alamos and from 30 to 80 or more pits per year at SRS. DOE has not explained why such massive pit production is needed to refurbish existing nuclear weapon or for a new generation of destabilizing new nuclear weapons. DOE contractors, who would stand to profit from new plutonium facilities, will predictably be the biggest boosters of them, according to Savannah River Site Watch.

"Siting of new factories at SRS or elsewhere to produce the plutonium components of nuclear weapons is a provocative move that will further stimulate a nuclear arms race and result in a host of nuclear waste and toxic waste streams," said Tom Clements, director of the public interest organization Savannah River Site Watch. "If the troubling and costly pit-production proposal goes forward, a full-blown nation-wide Environmental Impact Statement process will be legally required, with public participation at every step of decision making. While there may be some jobs that come with a

plutonium pit plant, the environmental and arms control risks associated with new nuclear bomb facilities are high and will involve careful public review by citizens in South Carolina and elsewhere,” added Clements. “The public in South Carolina will be concerned about management and disposal of the nuclear and chemical waste streams associated with pit production and will likely be alarmed about any plans to dump such waste at SRS.”

A DOE summary document - “Analysis of Alternatives” - that leaked out in November 2017 and which was obtained by Savannah River Site Watch examined various alternatives for new pit production. That document concluded “refurbishment” of the soon-to-be-halted plutonium fuel (MOX) building at SRS was one of two “preferred alternatives.” The Waste Solidification Building, associated with the failed MOX project, and new facilities at SRS were also analyzed. The MOX-plant alternative was cheaper than other options but repurposing the “partially completed facility” would have risks, according to the summary document.

In the past, large-scale pit production took place at the Rocky Flats site in Colorado, which had a host of nightmarish problems related to plutonium handling, including plutonium fires and irresponsible on-site dumping of plutonium and other waste. DOE closed Rocky Flats, located near Denver, in 1989 after an FBI raid, leaving behind plutonium-contaminated soil. Large amounts of plutonium waste from Rocky Flats were dumped into the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in New Mexico and plutonium materials in process, including plutonium contaminated with chemicals such as chlorides and beryllium, was shipped to SRS, where it remains in storage in the K-Area (where 13 metric tons of plutonium are stored).

In the early 2000s, DOE proposed a “Modern Pit Facility” (MPF) at SRS or another DOE site and many members of the public in South Carolina and Georgia spoke up against the proposal at Environmental Impact Statement meetings in North Augusta, South Carolina. In a victory for the environment and arms control, DOE cancelled the pursuit of that unnecessary facility in January 2004. “In the battle over a pit plant at SRS in the early 2000s, it was those who would profit from it who supported it and citizens who were concerned about nuclear and toxic waste at SRS who opposed it,” said Clements, who participated in the DOE’s EIS process on the facility. “I expect the same alignment of profiteer versus environmental concerns in regard to any plutonium pit plant at SRS that Congress might choose to pursue.”

DOE officials have recently testified to Congress that the MOX building is substantially blew 50% complete and that \$5.4 billion has been spent on construction. DOE, the White House and congressional committees are united in the effort to terminate the MOX project as it is financially and technically unsustainable. DOE has stuck with its \$17.2 billion cost estimate for the mismanaged construction of the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility and that it would not be finished until 2048.

In order to terminate the MOX project, Secretary of Energy Perry is authorized by the National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal year 2018 to waive MOX construction if an alternative method of plutonium disposition is available that is 50% of the cost of MOX. A report on cost of plutonium disposition options is due to be delivered to Congress soon. The *Nuclear Deterrence and Security Monitor* reported on May 4, 2018 that Virginia Kay, deputy director of the DOE National Nuclear Security Administration’s Office of Material Disposition said on May 2 that the cost report on plutonium disposition options would be delivered in a “Juneish” timeframe. Once terminated, the MOX plant will be available for other use and

SRS Watch has called for missions that do not produce waste, such as storage or packaging of existing waste.

SRS Watch is aware that worker turnover at the bungled MOX project is high and that construction problems (so-called “rework”) remain a huge challenge. SRS Watch continues to call for ample notification to workers of the MOX project termination and for severance pay and help in locating new jobs. “MOX workers must be treated with much more respect than were workers at SCE&G’s terminated nuclear reactors construction project, who were thrown out of work with essentially no notice and no severance pay,” added Clements.

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**Notes:**

See "Plutonium Pit Production Analysis of Alternatives (AoA) Results and Next Steps," by DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration, November 2017, obtained by SRS Watch:

[http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/presentation\\_nnsa\\_on\\_pits\\_november\\_2017.pdf](http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/presentation_nnsa_on_pits_november_2017.pdf)

***NNSA Implies that SRS is being Analyzed for New Nuclear Weapons Mission: Production of Plutonium “Pits,” the Core of Nuclear Weapons; Reuse of Soon-to-be Mothballed MOX Building Likely a Focus; Comments by NNSA Official at DNFSB Hearing First Indication of Review of Pit Production Capability, SRS Watch news release, June 13, 2017***

[http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srs\\_watch\\_news\\_on\\_plutonium\\_pit\\_analysis\\_june\\_13\\_2017.pdf](http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srs_watch_news_on_plutonium_pit_analysis_june_13_2017.pdf)

See National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2018, signed into law on Dec. 12, 2017 for report on a new pit facility by May 11, 2018:

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2810>. See [H. Rept. 115-404 \(Conference Report\)](https://www.congress.gov/115/crpt/hrpt404/CRPT-115hrpt404.pdf): <https://www.congress.gov/115/crpt/hrpt404/CRPT-115hrpt404.pdf> - see page 637 for language about delivery of pit report “150 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.” (signed into law on December 12, 2017)

House Armed Services, in H.R. 5515—FY19 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL , SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES, May 9, 2018, included language for a new report on “pit production requirements” to be delivered by DOE. This is not law.

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS29/20180426/108200/BILLS-1155515ih.pdf>

“Therefore, the committee directs the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of Energy and the Commander of U.S. Strategic Command, to submit a report to the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and the House of Representatives by September 30, 2018, on the annual pit production requirement, including any associated timelines.”

**Plutonium pit production horror story: “What is the History Rocky Flats,” by the Colorado government:**

[https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/HM\\_sf-rocky-flats-exposures-study-history-of-site.pdf](https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/HM_sf-rocky-flats-exposures-study-history-of-site.pdf)