



Savannah River Site Watch

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**DOE Posts NNSA Budget Request, Confirms MOX Termination at Savannah River Site, Focus on
“Dilute & Dispose” for Plutonium Disposition**

**Budget Request States Plans is to Ramp up Dilute & Dispose to Remove “1 metric ton (MT) of
Plutonium from the State of South Carolina” and Dispose of 34 Metric Tons**

National Nuclear Security Administration Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2019:

<https://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2018/02/f49/DOE-FY2019-Budget-Volume-1.pdf>

Columbia, SC – The U.S Department of Energy has posted the detailed Fiscal Year 2019 budget request for nuclear weapons and non-proliferation programs, including for the termination of the bungled the plutonium fuel MOX project at the Savannah River Site.

The budget request for “Material Disposition” focuses on funding that primarily “reflects the effort to expedite the removal of 1MT of plutonium from the state of South Carolina and transition to the dilute and dispose strategy” for 34 metric tons of surplus weapons plutonium is \$57 million.

The budget requests \$279 million to terminate the MOX boondoggle, an amount \$56 million less than the FY 2018 budget amount of \$332.7 million that continues construction at a shut-down level. \$220 million of the FY2019 request would go to actual construction n termination, which would involve such things securing the half-finished MOX building and closing outside entrances and slowing phasing out construction and engineering staff. Termination of the project would proceed in an orderly manner utilizing the “Defense Acquisition University Smart ShutDown Guidebook” as a guide.

“Now that the detailed DOE budget request for plutonium disposition has been released, the discussion on how best to smoothly terminate the dead-end MOX project can begin in earnest,” said Tom Clements, director of Savannah River Site Watch. “It’s good to finally see the basic plans for the long-awaited termination of the MOX debacle. It’s time for Congress to get on with MOX-termination job and stop the massive waste of taxpayer money on this badly bungled project that can never be finished due to chronic management and construction problems,” added Clements.

The budget reveals new details on MOX termination once Congress act to formally terminate the mismanaged MOX project:

“Upon approval from Congress in FY 2018, the Department will direct the MOX prime contractor to develop a plan within 90 days to terminate the project and begin to secure information, materials, and equipment at the job site to protect government assets and ensure the safety of workers. The disposition of certain temporary and permanent facilities will be planned; equipment will be prepared for storage or disposition as appropriate. In general, the contractor will begin termination of the sub-contracts and leases. Where cost effective, the MOX prime contractor will be directed to complete existing subcontracts and leases but refrain from beginning any new procurements without government approval. DOE will also begin discussions to negotiate the final costs to terminate the contract. Notification of personnel actions will be made as required by applicable law. A final estimate to complete the project shutdown and contract termination is expected to be produced during late calendar year 2018, with final termination completed in FY 2021. In FY 2019, the Administration will continue with termination activities for the MOX project and will continue to pursue the dilute and dispose strategy for plutonium disposition.”

Concerning the “dilute and dispose” option, the only alternative to MOX now being pursued, the budget states that “In FY 2019, the Dispose subprogram will complete an independent validation of a detailed lifecycle cost estimate for the dilute and dispose alternative.” DOE aims in FY2019 to pursue efforts that “will require hiring, training and appropriate clearance qualifications of additional employees.

SRS Watch has supported immobilization of plutonium in existing high-level waste at SRS, though that project has been dormant for many years.

The budget states that the goal for “Surplus Plutonium Disposition,” via dilute and dispose is “By the end of FY 2027, complete design, construction, and cold start-up activities for the SPD project.” The budget estimates that construction of D&D facilities would be \$500 million and operating costs would be \$2.4 billion and that D&D would be finished in 2047, a year before DOE now estimates the MOX plant would be finished. In the budget request, DOE sticks by a MOX construction cost of \$17.2 billion, in the event the project were to drag on.

To expand dilute and dispose, now taking place at a very low capacity at SRS, a next step would be to expand downblending capacity in the K-Area by adding more gloveboxes in which plutonium could be blended with an inert material called “stardust” and packaged for disposal in the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico.

The National Academies of Sciences is currently conducting a review of WIPP’s capacity for such downblended material. (See: <https://www8.nationalacademies.org/cp/projectview.aspx?key=49899>.) DOE and the New Mexico Environment Department are set to hold meetings in early March about recalculating volume of disposal containers to allow more waste and plutonium into WIPP. (See notice of meetings: http://www.wipp.energy.gov/rcradox/rfc/Volume_of_Record.pdf)

The budget request briefly mentions the issue of expanded production of pits for nuclear weapons – a confirmation of a go-slow approach concerning analyzing such capacity at SRS: “Fund other project costs associated with pre-conceptual design efforts supporting the selection of a single preferred alternative for plutonium pit production beyond 30 war reserve pits per year.”

Likewise, the project of management of tritium for nuclear weapons, including the role of the Tritium Extraction Facility (TEF) at SRS is in the budget request with this goal in FY 2019: “Conduct two extraction

at the TEF, beginning the ramp-up to full operations mode.” The request for “Tritium Sustainment” is \$205,275,000.

Tritium extraction, processing and packaging into reservoirs (that go into nuclear weapons) make SRS a key nuclear weapons site. Expanding into plutonium pit production at SRS would be a new mission and the unneeded and controversial project, even if in the soon-to-be-terminated MOX plant, would face opposition, according to SRS Watch..

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Notes:

DOE budget volume 1 – for National Nuclear Security Administration, for Fiscal Year 2019:

<https://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2018/02/f49/DOE-FY2019-Budget-Volume-1.pdf>

DOE FY 2019 budget documents released as of the afternoon of February 26, 2018, posted here:

<https://energy.gov/cfo/downloads/fy-2019-budget-justification>

Most recent aerial photos of MOX project – by High Flyer, January 31, 2018:

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1SZ9lqOqb-50HOuJJ9IHVwa_t8DYvfP13