



Savannah River Site Watch

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For Immediate Release

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U.S. Confirms to IAEA that 4.5 Metric Tons of Surplus Plutonium have been Disposed of as Waste

Overlooked in Plutonium Disposition Debate: DOE has already Disposed of Large Amount of Surplus Weapons Plutonium as Waste in the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), Including from SRS

[SRS Watch Releases Photo of its Director at WIPP Standing by SRS Plutonium Waste Drums, October 1](#)

Columbia, SC – The United States Government has confirmed that 4.5 metric tons (4500 kilograms) of surplus plutonium have been disposed of as waste. This plutonium, from DOE’s Rocky Flats (now closed), Hanford and the Savannah River Site, was disposed of in the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, according to DOE.

In its annual voluntarily reporting to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) by the U.S mission to the IAEA in Geneva, the U.S. stated that “4.5 metric tons that has been disposed to waste after termination of safeguards.” This plutonium would have been downblended with an inert material and disposed of in the Department of Energy’s Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico.

“It’s clear that much US surplus plutonium has been disposed of in WIPP, a fact that is being ignored by some as the fate of the mismanaged MOX project continues to hang in the balance,” said Tom Clements, director of Savannah River Site Watch, a public interest organization based in Columbia, South Carolina. “While we continue to support immobilization of plutonium in high-level waste as the best option for plutonium disposition, the reality that WIPP has already been used for plutonium disposition simply can’t be ignored.”

The reporting document, entitled *Communication Received from the United States of America concerning its Policies Regarding the Management of Plutonium* was made via the IAEA’s voluntary system on reporting of plutonium holdings by a number of countries via “Information Circular 549” (INFCIRC 549) and covered the period through December 31, 2014.

The DOE’s *Final Report of the Plutonium Disposition Red Team*, August 2015, confirmed that plutonium from Rocky Flats, Hanford and Savannah River Site has been disposed of as waste in WIPP: “...this approach for dispositioning excess plutonium oxide materials has already been used at several DOE sites in the past (the Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site, the Hanford Site, and SRS).”

Plutonium disposed of as waste is mixed with an inert, classified material called “stardust” and placed in small containers that are then placed in disposal drums. About 150 grams of plutonium can be placed in a “Pipe Overpack Container” (POC) for disposal in WIPP. A larger container called a “Criticality Control

Overpack" (CCO) can hold about 350 grams of plutonium but the CCO does not have final approval for disposal in WIPP.

Downblending of plutonium at SRS took place in the HB-Line at SRS before the facility was used for production of unneeded plutonium oxide for "feed stock" for the MOX plant. The glovebox in K-Area can be used for this mission and is expected to start such operations in 2016 after required safety and operations documents are prepared. Once downblended, "safeguards" to control access to the material, can be terminated, thus making the waste regular transuranic waste (TRU).

According to communication from SRS to SRS Watch, SRS has packaged and shipped 55 kilograms for disposal at WIPP. 260 drums containing POCs await shipment to WIPP and those drums are now being stored as TRU waste at SRS. WIPP communicated to SRS Watch that 222 drums containing POCs had been shipped from SRS to WIPP. In all, SRS Watch estimates that SRS has prepared about 90 kgs of plutonium for disposal in WIPP.

An *Interim Action Determination* signed by the former SRS site manager in October 2011 authorized SRS to package up to 500 kgs of surplus weapons plutonium for shipment to WIPP. That material was stored in the 12.8 metric ton plutonium stockpile in the K-Area at SRS.

On October 1, 2015, during a site visit at WIPP, Tom Clements of SRS Watch, confirmed that 97 drums containing POCs from SRS were stored on the surface in the Waste Handling Building at WIPP. Clements stood amongst the drums, which had no special security as they are considered transuranic (TRU) waste. These drums were stranded on the surface when WIPP closed and WIPP officials stated that they would be amongst the first material moved underground into WIPP when the site reopens. SRS Watch also viewed the large concrete culverts containing POCs during an SRS site tour of March 25, 2015.

The U.S. "INFCIRC 549" report to the IAEA also reveals that the U.S. has declared that 44.4 metric tons of separated, unirradiated plutonium are in storage. Several tons of the 12.8 MT of plutonium stored at the Savannah River Site are under IAEA safeguards.

Notes:

INFCIRC 549, 30 October 2015, "Communication Received from the United States of America concerning its Policies Regarding the Management of Plutonium" (through 31 December 2014) – <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/infcirc549a6-18.pdf>

Interim Action Determination, October 17, 2011 – approval by SRS site manager to ship up to 500 kilograms of plutonium to WIPP

http://www.srs.gov/general/pubs/envbul/documents/Interim_Action_500kg_to_WIPP_10-17-11.pdf

Letter of former DOE secretary Bill Richardson, August 21, 2015 - very confused letter in which Mr. Richardson shockingly reveals that he has forgotten that WIPP, which opened in 1999 when he was DOE secretary, has been used for plutonium disposition

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/richardson_08-21-15_signed_br_to_hr.pdf

Photo of Tom Clements, SRS Watch director, standing at WIPP beside drums of plutonium from SRS, October 1, 2015 – the drums contain “Pipe Overpack Containers” and 97 such drums are stranded on the surface at WIPP, in the Waste Handling Building, and are awaiting placement in the now-closed WIPP facility; photo take during WIPP tour by SRS watch and public interest groups, the tour include a trip down into the WIPP salt mine

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/1147925_orig.jpg

Update on DOE’s Problem-Plagued Plutonium Disposition Program, by SRS Watch, April 9, 2015 – contains March 25, 2015 photos of unused POC and COC and culverts in which packaged POCs are stored in E-Area at SRS; information concerning a return to POC packaging by SRS in October 2015 is out of date – SRS aims to restart such packaging in 2016

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/update_on_mox_boondoggle_and_mfff_construction_problems_and_pu_disposition_at_srsapril_9_2015.pdf

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