



Savannah River Site Watch

**Savannah River Site Watch**

<http://www.srswatch.org/>

**Columbia, South Carolina USA**

**For Immediate Release**

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### **Shipment by Sea of Plutonium from Japan to US DOE's Savannah River Site Gets Under Way**

**Shipment being Conducted as Part of Upcoming Nuclear Security Summit Sends Troubling Signal that Foreign Plutonium can be Dumped at SRS, in South Carolina, with No Disposal Plan and Absent Adequate Nuclear Non-Proliferation Justification**

#### ***UK-Flagged Ship Pacific Egret Spotted at Dock as Plutonium being Loaded in Tokai, Japan***

Columbia, South Carolina, USA – Despite questions raised about the justification for the shipment, a sea transport of plutonium from Japan to the U.S. Department of Energy's Savannah River Site (SRS) has begun.

The loading for the shipment of 331 kilograms (730 pounds) of plutonium aboard the British-flagged ship Pacific Egret, and accompanied by the Pacific Heron, began on the morning of March 21, Japan time. Both ships are armed and it is unknown if military vessels will also accompany the two vessels in the 50+-day transport to the military port in Charleston, South Carolina. From Charleston, the plutonium will be carried by truck to SRS and will be added to the 13 metric ton plutonium already stranded at SRS with no viable disposal path out of the site.

The shipment is being conducted in advance of the upcoming Nuclear Security Summit - March 31 to April 1 in Washington - but does nothing to address the growing plutonium stockpiling crisis in Japan and only exacerbates the plutonium storage and disposition problems at SRS, according to the public interest group Savannah River Site Watch.

"While we recognize the need to secure plutonium that may pose risks, the US Government has done a poor job of explaining why this material is being taken to SRS," said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. "The majority of the plutonium in the shipment came from Britain, so this is largely a problem for that country to deal with. As Britain is avoiding its responsibilities, with US agreement, the bulk of the shipment unfortunately appears to be commerce in plutonium being brought under the guise of nuclear non-proliferation to SRS for nuclear dumping purposes," added Clements.

According to the DOE's Fiscal Year 2017 budget request of February 2, 2016, Japan is to "contribute funds" to pay for plutonium disposal facilities at SRS. But no such disposal facilities at SRS are yet designed or funded and there is no US disposal site that currently would accept the plutonium waste form.

The arrival of the Pacific Egret was observed by non-governmental organization (NGO) personnel on the ground at the port of Tokai-Mura. This information was relayed to the informal international ship-spotting network, in which SRS Watch participates. (SRS Watch observed the UK-flagged Oceanic Pintail depart Charleston on February 15 after secretly bringing plutonium from Germany and Switzerland.)

The cargo, enough for more than 40 nuclear weapons, consists of plutonium supplied to Japan in the 1960s and 1970s for nuclear reactor research purposes. The plutonium was used in a test facility called the Fast Critical Assembly (FCA), located at the Tokai research center. 236 kilograms of the plutonium are of origin from the United Kingdom and 2 kg are of French origin but neither the DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) nor the White House have attempted to justify dumping this foreign-origin plutonium at SRS, where there is no viable disposal path for it. DOE stated in a recent environmental document on shipment of up to 900 kilograms of foreign plutonium to be brought to SRS that the material had to be disposed of as waste.

The UK has a stockpile of over 120 metric tons of plutonium and sound nuclear non-proliferation policies dictate that the UK should take care of its own material, according to SRS Watch. France, also a nuclear weapon state, likewise has a massive plutonium stockpile.

The shipment does nothing to address the much larger problem of Japan's effort to continue stockpiling plutonium via the reprocessing of commercial spent fuel. Japan already has 10.8 metric tons of weapon-usable plutonium domestically stockpiled and 36 MT stored at reprocessing plants in France and the UK. Japan aims to stockpile more plutonium if the Rokkasho reprocessing plant is ever operated.

"The upcoming Nuclear Security Summit will likely do nothing to curtail Japan's plutonium stockpiling program but will unfortunately settle for a hollow claim of success for the plutonium shipment that has just begun," according to Clements. "The US must now reassess its position at the summit and push hard for Japan to cease reprocessing and plutonium stockpiling due to the proliferation threat those programs pose," added Clements.

Under the US-Japan Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, Japan was given approval by the US, which has supplied reactors and uranium fuel, to begin its reprocessing program. The US is thus in large part responsible for the massive growth in Japan's plutonium stockpile. In order to halt Japan's continued plutonium stockpiling, SRS Watch is calling for a change in the cooperation agreement when it's up for renegotiation in 2018 to disallow further reprocessing or use of plutonium as MOX fuel.

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#### Notes:

1. Many photos of the Pacific Egret and Pacific Heron can be found on the SRS Watch website and can be used with. Likewise, much information about this and other shipments can be found on the website:

<http://www.srswatch.org/>

2. US DOE Environmental Assessment, prepared in secret on shipment of up to 900 kg of foreign plutonium to SRS: **Gap Material Plutonium - Transport, Receipt, and Processing**, December 28, 2015; a footnote on page 6 makes clear that the plutonium can't be used as MOX fuel:

**EA-2024: Final Environmental Assessment:** <http://energy.gov/nepa/downloads/ea-2024-final-environmental-assessment>

3. Voluntary reporting on Japan's plutonium stockpile to the International Atomic Energy commission, INFCIRC 549, August 28, 2015: <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/infirc549a1-18.pdf>

4. SRS Watch report on plutonium to SRS, December 21, 2015: [\*\*DOE'S SOUTH CAROLINA PLUTONIUM DILEMMA: PLUTONIUM KEEPS SECRETLY COMING IN BUT NO VIABLE PLAN TO TAKE IT OUT\*\*](#)

5. DOE budget request volume 1, see pages 471-472 & 540:  
<http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2016/02/f29/FY2017BudgetVolume1.pdf>

6. For more detailed analysis of Japan's plutonium program and future prospects see [\*\*Nuclear Proliferation in Plain Sight\*\*](#): Japan's Plutonium Fuel Cycle—A Technical and Economic Failure But a Strategic Success, Japan Focus, March 2016.

7. Japan's TBS News on the shipment, March 21, 2016, with a photo of the Pacific Egret at dock:  
[http://news.tbs.co.jp/newseye/tbs\\_newseye2730250.html](http://news.tbs.co.jp/newseye/tbs_newseye2730250.html)

8. Kyodo News/AP article, March 21, 2016: [\*\*Two British ships arrive in Japan to carry plutonium to US\*\*](#)

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