



Savannah River Site Watch

**Savannah River Site Watch
Columbia, South Carolina, USA
For Immediate Release
December 29, 2015**

As US DOE Refuses to Act in Public Interest and Release “Draft Environmental Assessment” on Import of Up to 900 Kilograms of “Gap” Plutonium to Savannah River Site, SRS Watch Releases Document

Public has Right to Know Plans to Import Plutonium to SRS in Conjunction with Upcoming “Nuclear Security Summit;” Plutonium Will be Stranded with No Clear Disposition Path Out of South Carolina

[Draft “ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR GAP MATERIAL PLUTONIUM – TRANSPORT, RECEIPT, AND PROCESSING” linked here](#)

Columbia, South Carolina, USA – As the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has refused to release a key document that reveals plans by DOE to import up to 900 kilograms (~1980 pounds) of plutonium to the Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina, the public interest group Savannah River Site Watch has publicly released the document.

The 71-page draft ***ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR GAP MATERIAL PLUTONIUM – TRANSPORT, RECEIPT, AND PROCESSING*** contains nothing of a sensitive or classified nature and contains no markings that it be withheld from distribution. The document was provided to the States of South Carolina and Georgia, whose comments were solicited, but the document is being withheld from the public.

“In order to serve the public interest, SRS Watch is compelled to release this document on plutonium import to SRS as DOE has totally failed to act in an open manner and formally release the document,” said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. “In spite of non-proliferation and security concerns with plutonium, there is no excuse for DOE’s silence and secrecy on a matter important to the public as the proposed action will result in plutonium being stranded with no viable disposition path out of SRS. DOE must now do the right thing and release the plutonium-import document, announce a public comment period and hold public meetings.”

A main motivation for preparing the document in secret and withholding it from the public is believed by SRS Watch to be the U.S. Government’s hurried aim to declare at the upcoming Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) in Washington at the end of March 2016 that the plutonium shipments have begun. The U.S. and Japan declared at the end of the NSS in 2014 that 331 kilograms of plutonium at the “Fast Critical Assembly” in Japan would be removed. It appears that DOE’s goal is to quickly make a decision by the time of the upcoming NSS to start moving the material from Japan to SRS by ship (or by plane if a security crisis at the storage facility in Japan is determined).

Over the past weeks, SRS Watch requested several times that DOE and the DOE’s National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) publicly release the document, announce a public comment period and hold a public meeting but the repeated requests have been met with silence. The public was only

informed of the existence of the document via a listing in a schedule of release of all environmental impact statements (EISs) and environmental assessments (EAs) now under preparation by DOE/NNSA.

SRS Watch believes that the deadline for comments by South Carolina and Georgia has passed and that DOE aims to issue a “Finding of No Significant Impact” (FONSI) around mid-January, in which DOE would affirm the import and decline to prepare a more in-depth Environmental Impact Statement. Though comments were not solicited from the public, SRS Watch submitted a comment for the record and believes a full EIS must be prepared.

NNSA’s Office of Material Management and Minimization (M3), formerly known as the Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI), is in charge of the plutonium shipment plans.

The draft EA reveals:

- DOE wants to import up to 900 kilograms of “at risk” plutonium stored in foreign countries to SRS, for storage and processing;
- The plutonium would be imported from 7 countries over 7 years in up to 12 sea shipments via the Joint Base Charleston-Weapons Station (Charleston, South Carolina), but could be flown in non-certified containers if a “national security exemption” is determined;
- “NNSA has identified weapons-usable gap material plutonium at facilities in foreign countries that poses a potential threat to national security, is susceptible to use in an improvised nuclear device, and presents a high risk of theft or diversion.”
- “Approximately 375 kilograms (827 pounds) of gap material plutonium would need to be processed at SRS before disposition;”
- “Disposition of these additional quantities of gap material plutonium would be accomplished in the same manner as disposition of U.S. surplus plutonium.” *Thus, there is no viable disposition plan for any amount of plutonium now at SRS, the plutonium would thus be stranded at SRS;*
- “Exclusive-use ships operate as chartered vessels and are not used for the transport of any other cargo other than the plutonium (and potentially SNF) they are hired to transport.” *It is believed that these ships will be UK-flagged vessels owned by Pacific Nuclear Transport Limited (PNTL), such as the Pacific Egret and Pacific Heron – see ship photos on SRS Watch website and Facebook page;*

and, of significant note:

- “Gap plutonium would not meet MOX fuel fabrication acceptance criteria and, therefore, would not be considered for disposition via the MOX fuel disposition pathway.” (page 6, footnote)

Notes:

1. **Draft ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR GAP MATERIAL PLUTONIUM – TRANSPORT, RECEIPT, AND PROCESSING**, November 2015

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/gap_pu_draft_environmental_assessment_november_2015.pdf

2. **“U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS STATUS CHART,”** December 2016 – see page 24 for listing of draft EA
http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2015/12/f27/StatusChart_December2015v2.pdf

3. **SRS Watch news release, December 21, 2015:**

U.S. Department of Energy Quietly Gearing Up to Bring 331 Kilograms of Plutonium in Japan to Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina with No Exit Path Out of the State -- Import being Pursued in Advance of Nuclear Security Summit in March 2016 Includes 236 Kg of UK-Origin Plutonium that Should Not Go to SRS Given Struggles with Plutonium Fuel (MOX) Program -- In Report Released Today, SRS Watch Calls on State of South Carolina to Oppose UK Plutonium to SRS:

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srs_watch_news_japan_plutonium_december_21_2015.pdf

4. **White House “Announcement of the Nuclear Security Summit in 2016 – “The fourth and final Nuclear Security Summit will be held March 31-April 1, 2016, at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, DC,” August 5, 2015”:**
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/08/05/announcement-nuclear-security-summit-2016>
5. **“Finding of No Significant Impact” (FONSI) on DOE’s Environmental Assessment prepared in secret in 2010 on import of up to 100 kg of plutonium to SRS, May 26, 2010**
http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/nepapub/nepa_documents/RedDont/EA-1771-FONSI-2010.pdf
6. **DOE officials visit PNTL vessels in 2015:** At this PNTL website: <http://www.pntl.co.uk/about-us/stakeholder-group/> -- See minutes of the "Ramsden Dock Terminal Stakeholder Group (RDTSG)" of 14 December 2015: <http://www.pntl.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/15th-RDTSG-Minutes-FINAL.pdf> -- see page 5:

“Visitors

Since July 2015 the Terminal has hosted delegation visits from:

- Panamanian MP’s
- Japanese
- US DOE”

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