



Savannah River Site Watch

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

Columbia, South Carolina

Media Advisory

May 4, 2015

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After Chronic Delays, DOE's Terminates Plutonium Disposition EIS Process, Discarding the Problem-Plagued Plutonium Fuel (MOX) Option as the "Preferred Option" and Affirming that the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) is Not Now Pursuing MOX Use

CB&I AREVA MOX Services Dealt another Blow in its Push for \$51+ Billion MOX Project

[Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental EIS documents linked here – quietly placed on this DOE website in the last few days](#)

Columbia, South Carolina -- After a lengthy and embarrassing delay, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has concluded the preparation of an environmental document on the disposition of surplus weapons plutonium by abandoning its earlier preference to produce plutonium fuel (MOX) from the material. DOE states in a document released over the weekend that it no longer has a preference for how to dispose of a quantity of surplus plutonium, affirming that the MOX program at the DOE's Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina remains at high risk of being shut down.

DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) had been expected to issue the final environmental document in early 2013 but due to growing problems with the MOX program, DOE froze release of it and indicated for almost two years that it was "under departmental review." DOE mailed out DVDs with the documents, which arrived to at least one location in South Carolina on Saturday, May 2. DOE also quietly posted the final documents on its website in the last few days. The date of a Federal Register notice on the formal release of the document is expected later this week.

In complete reversal of DOE's earlier pro-MOX policy, the final Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SPD SEIS) concludes that DOE no longer prefers the MOX option but rather states that it has no "preferred alternative" for plutonium disposal "at this time":

"DOE has no Preferred Alternative at this time for the disposition of the 13.1 metric tons (14.4 tons) of surplus plutonium that is the subject of this *SPD Supplemental EIS*. Also, DOE has no Preferred

Alternative regarding the sites or facilities to be used to prepare surplus plutonium metal for disposition (i.e., pit disassembly and conversion capability). Consistent with the requirements of NEPA, once a Preferred Alternative is identified, DOE will announce its preference in a *Federal Register* notice. DOE would publish a ROD [Record of Decision] no sooner than 30 days after its announcement of a Preferred Alternative.” (page S-42)

“The decision by DOE to officially back away from the MOX option is the only sensible thing the department could do as it is obvious that the MOX program is no longer financially viable and must be terminated,” according to Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch, a public interest group located in Columbia, South Carolina. Clements, who spoke at various SEIS meetings in 2010 and 2012 in Tennessee, Alabama and South Carolina, went on to say “Now that DOE no longer supports the MOX option, it is urgent that Congress halt the MOX project by withdrawing funding and that DOE get on with deploying cheaper and safer options at SRS to dispose of plutonium as waste. Immobilization of plutonium in high-level nuclear waste at SRS must take top priority as DOE reviews non-MOX options.” Clements has also attended numerous other plutonium disposition EIS meetings starting in the mid-1990s.

The “Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement” (SPD SEIS) reviewed “the environmental impacts of alternatives for disposition of 13.1 metric tons (14.4 tons) of surplus plutonium for which a disposition path is not assigned.” DOE not conduct a new analysis of disposal of other plutonium – in the form of weapons “pits” – now is storage or still in weapons. Lack of a preference for MOX in the document just released will impact decision on plutonium disposition for all surplus plutonium.

A draft SEIS released in July 2012 stated that the “MOX Fuel Alternative is DOE’s Preferred Alternative for surplus plutonium disposition.” Before more storm clouds gathered over the MOX program it was expected that DOE’s final “preferred alternative” would have been MOX for purer plutonium and disposal in the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) for plutonium too contaminated to be made into MOX fuel. (SRS Watch has learned that SRS is set to renew the packaging of some plutonium for WIPP in October 2015 – see plutonium disposition update of April 9, linked below.)

In the final document, DOE also confirmed that the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) is currently no longer pursuing irradiation of MOX fuel in any of the three reactors located at Browns Ferry in Alabama or the two located at the Sequoyah site in Tennessee:

“This *SPD Supplemental EIS* evaluates disposition alternatives that include irradiation of MOX fuel in TVA reactors, subject to appropriate amendments to the applicable licenses from the NRC. TVA is a cooperating agency for this *SPD Supplemental EIS* and, as such, is not required to declare a preferred alternative. TVA does not have a preferred alternative at this time regarding whether to pursue irradiation of MOX fuel in TVA reactors and which reactors might be used for this purpose.” (page S-42)

“Given that the MOX project is in deep trouble and is likely not to survive, TVA must now officially withdraw from any consideration of use of experimental plutonium fuel,” said Clements. “Even though TVA in the past reacted to DOE pressure to consider MOX use, that pressure has now been lifted and

TVA can assure the public that it will never again consider use of the controversial MOX fuel in its gaining reactors.” A formal rejection of MOX use will spare TVA lengthy in-reactor testing and licensing by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission of MOX, according to SRS Watch. (See [Appendix J](#) in SEIS documents linked below – “EVALUATION OF SELECT REACTOR ACCIDENTS WITH MIXED OXIDE FUEL USE AT THE BROWNS FERRY AND SEQUOYAH NUCLEAR PLANTS”)

DOE has no other nuclear utilities interested in using the experimental MOX fuel made from weapons plutonium, a fuel form which has never been used commercially anywhere in the world. With no reactors lined up to use MOX, the project would get nowhere even if construction, design, and startup problems could be overcome.

While the environmental review languished, DOE slowly continued with construction of the MOX plant at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina but problems have only mounted as the cost of the project skyrocketed. The cost of the mismanaged MOX project is now estimated by DOE to be between \$51 billion and \$114 billion, up dramatically from the \$30 billion DOE estimate in April 2014. The estimate for the MOX plant construction and startup is \$12.7 billion (in DOE’s Fiscal Year 2016 budget request). The current annual funding level for the MOX project is \$345 million, which places it on a closure track as it needs far more than that to be viable at any phase of the project.

Notes:

Summary of Final Supplemental EIS on Surplus Plutonium Disposition

http://nnsa.energy.gov/sites/default/files/EIS-0283-S2_Summary.pdf

DOE website with documents on “Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental EIS,” beginning in July 2010; draft SEIS issued in July 2012

<http://nnsa.energy.gov/aboutus/ouroperations/generalcounsel/nepaoverview/nepa/spdsupplementaleis>

DOE’s “Schedule of Key Environmental Impact Statements,” April 15, 2015 – “Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental EIS” still listed as “Under Departmental Review”

http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2015/04/f21/KeyEISSchedule_April2015.pdf

DOE’s list of key plutonium disposition environmental documents, back to 1997

<http://energy.gov/nepa/eis-0283-surplus-plutonium-disposition-environmental-impact-statement>

SRS Watch plutonium disposition update, April 9, 2015

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

SRS Watch plutonium disposition update, April 29, 2015

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srs_watch_update_on_mox_seis_inaction_nrc_lack_of_inspection_april_29_2015.pdf

Aerial photos of MOX plant and area around it, legally taken on April 21, 2015 by High Flyer, exclusive to SRS Watch, may be used with credit:

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/7615278.jpg>

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/6084933.jpg>

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/846986.jpg>

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/8956547.jpg>

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/6084933.jpg>

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/8857519.jpg>

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/3203966.jpg>

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