



Savannah River Site Watch

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www.srswatch.org

Media Alert

May 14, 2014

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**Safety Problems at Savannah River Site Draw Attention of Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board;
In May 13 Response to SRS Watch, SRS Acknowledges Problems and Says it is Addressing Them**

SRS Watch to Meet with DNFSB in Washington on May 21 to Discuss SRS Operational Issues

Columbia, SC – The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB), an independent agency that oversees safety of operations at Department of Energy clean-up sites, has identified a host of operational problems at the Savannah River Site (SRS) in the first quarter of 2014. In response to an inquiry by Savannah River Site Watch, SRS has issued a statement concerning the cited problems and says it is addressing them. (*see SRS email below*)

According to the DNFSB in an April 4 weekly report - *see it posted and linked below* - the “negative trends” at SRS are “affecting the productivity of several facilities and worker safety.” The board found problems in a number of facilities, including the aging H-Canyon reprocessing plant and the Defense Waste Processing Facility (DWF), an important SRS facility that mixes high-level nuclear waste with melted glass in order to solidify it in large containers.

“The number of safety-related incidents at SRS is alarming but it is encouraging that the DNFSB is doing its job and identify the problems and negative trends,” said Tom Clements, Director, Savannah River Site Watch. “Oversight by the DNFSB helps insure that operations at SRS are safely conducted.”

Savannah River Site Watch noticed that the DNFSB identified operational and safety problem at SRS and was alarmed by them. That concern prompted a May 2 inquiry of SRS and it took until May 12 for the SRS Office of External Affairs to respond with an emailed statement that had evidently been cleared through site management.

Acknowledging the problems raised by the DNFSB, SRS affirmed to SRS Watch on May 13 that it is “concerned about non-compliance with Technical Safety Requirements (TSRs), lack of rigor in Conduct of Operations, and contamination occurrences of recent months.” The official SRS response went on to say that “In response to these events, DOE-Savannah River Site has worked with the two contractor organizations to proactively analyze and put in place corrective actions to prevent recurrence.”

The DNFSB report stated that “During the first quarter of 2014, the site has experienced a mixture of external events, legacy issues, and events caused by inattention to detail, poor quality, or a failure to call a time out.” The board found that there were five worker contaminations in DWPF, five Potential

Inadequacies in the Safety Analysis (PISA) by Savannah River Remediation and Savannah River Nuclear Solutions and that on “five occasions, SRNS and SRR have not complied with their Technical Safety Requirements (TSR)” and that due to a “positive Unreviewed Safety Question” in the H-Canyon operations were halted.

“While it is of great concern that there is an increase in operational problems, we applaud SRS for committing to take corrective actions to identify the causes of the problems and address them,” added Clements. “SRS and site contractors must be much more diligent in abiding by proper procedures in the future and we will be attentive to corrective actions being taken. We applaud DNFSB staff for their diligence in monitoring SRS operations and the public rely on them to continue doing their jobs in such a responsible manner.”

As part of its public interest oversight mission related to SRS activities, Savannah River Site Watch will meet with DNFSB board members and staff on May 21 to discuss the identified problems and measures being taken to correct them. Other SRS issues will be discussed at the meeting, including management of 13 metric tons of weapon-grade plutonium now stored in the K-Area Materials Storage facility (KAMS). Tom Clements of SRS Watch has met on numerous occasions with members of the DNFSB and is appreciative of the cordial relations between public interest groups and the board members and staff.

SRS Watch believes that the number of problems that were noted by the DNFSB merits a report by SRS to the Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board (SRS CAB) at its upcoming May 19-20 meeting in Savannah, Georgia.

Notes:

1. Response from SRS to a May 2 inquiry from SRS Watch:

From: james-r.giusti <james-r.giusti@srs.gov>

To: Tom Clements <TomClements329@cs.com>

Subject: DOE-SRS Response on DNFSB Report

Date: Tue, May 13, 2014 4:40 pm

DOE's Savannah River Site remains concerned about non-compliance with Technical Safety Requirements (TSRs), lack of rigor in Conduct of Operations, and contamination occurrences of recent months. In response to these events, DOE-Savannah River Site has worked with the two contractor organizations to proactively analyze and put in place corrective actions to prevent recurrence. The Department is currently monitoring those actions through closure, and will verify adequacy of the corrective actions after closure.

In the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) weekly report for April 4, 2014, DNFSB Savannah River representatives listed several conduct of operations areas that Savannah River Remediation (SRR), the liquid waste contractor and Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS), the management and operating contractor need to address. SRR's areas include Technical Safety Requirements, Potential Inadequacies in the Safety Analysis (PISA), and 5 contamination events. The DNFSB report contains SRNS's problems with non-compliance of TSRs, in effect slowing progress towards risk reduction activities in Building 235-F and placing H-Canyon in warm standby mode for modifications to the ventilation system

Safety and Conduct of Operations remain paramount to safely accomplishing Savannah River Site's

missions of storage and disposition of nuclear materials, liquid waste, and decontamination and decommissioning projects.

DOE-SR has reviewed the contributing causes and corrective actions determined by contractors SRR and SRNS, and concur with the determinations of both organizations. Additionally, DOE-SR staff is tracking corrective actions and will verify adequate closure of the actions.

Safe and disciplined operation continues to be a fundamental expectation of the Department of Energy and the Savannah River Operations Office. DOE-SR, SRR and SRNS management have advised the technical staffs at all facilities to remain vigilant to safe and disciplined operations.

James R. Giusti
Director
DOE-SR Office Of External Affairs

2. DNFSB April 4, 2014 weekly report - <http://www.dnfsb.gov/>

http://www.dnfsb.gov/sites/default/files/Board%20Activities/Reports/Site%20Rep%20Weekly%20Reports/Savannah%20River%20Site/2014/wr_20140404_116_0.pdf

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

April 4, 2014

TO: S. A. Stokes, Technical Director

FROM: M. T. Sautman and D. L. Burnfield, Site Representatives

SUBJECT: Savannah River Site Weekly Report for Week Ending April 4, 2014

Perspective: During the first quarter of 2014, the site has experienced a mixture of external events, legacy issues, and events caused by inattention to detail, poor quality, or a failure to call a time out. This combination is affecting the productivity of several facilities and worker safety.

- After a long period with few issues, the trend for hazardous energy control has turned negative across the site with six recent reportable events. This week, SRR identified they had not been adequately controlling the radiological hazard of the hydro test rig used for testing the grout line integrity. SRNS had another lockout in 235-F where an energized component was unexpectedly found within the bounds of work that was previously deenergized.
- On five occasions, SRNS and SRR have not complied with their Technical Safety Requirements (TSR).
- During January and February, SRR had five contamination events at the Defense Waste Processing Facility (DWPF) compared to only two in the previous 10 months.
- At two SRNS non-nuclear facilities, a worker suffered a hand laceration with a reciprocating saw and another was sprayed in the face and eyes with a chemical solution.
- SRNS and SRR have declared five Potential Inadequacies in the Safety Analysis (PISA) in 2014. This is on top of 21 PISAs declared last year.
- SRNS stopped dissolver operations at H-Canyon last week when SRNL identified that measured hydrogen gas generation rates may be greater than the calculated hydrogen gas generation volume percent. As a result, SRNS declared a positive Unreviewed Safety Question this week. H-Canyon also went into warm standby mode this week and will

remain in standby for approximately eight weeks. Much of this time will be spent making modifications to the ventilation system to address the ground level release PISA.

- As a result of a TSR violation, the pace of Rec. 2012-1 work in 235-F was reduced for several weeks. This pace will be further impacted after engineers identified that several facility drawings were not readily accessible on the site's document control system.
- F/H Laboratory, H-Area Old Manufacturing (HAOM), and H-Canyon continue to repair air handling unit and fire protection systems damaged by the loss of steam in early January. As temperatures reached the upper 80s, SRNS had to curtail some laboratory operations to protect equipment and maintain accuracy and precision. SRR is still repairing and testing the damaged grout line at Saltstone. SRNS was able to declare the HAOM fire suppression system operable yesterday and exit their recovery plan.

DOE and contractor managers have been very sensitive to these negative trends and have been trying to take action before a more serious event occurs. SRNS conducted safety pauses at their facilities this week. HCanyon and HB-Line maintenance also held a pause to deal with recent performance issues. Last month, SRNS engineering held a pause to deal with technical rigor issues. SRR conducted a common cause analysis of their contamination events and has been trying to reduce the frequency of future ones by aggressively decontaminating and surveying parts of DWPF. Several organizations have or are developing improvement plans. The site reps continue to meet with operations, maintenance, radiological protection, training, and engineering management to discuss the above issues and the actions being taken to improve performance.

Tank Farms: The pump in F-Pump Pit 1 serves to transfer high-level waste from F to H-Tank Farm. SRR personnel failed to properly seat the instrument jumper for the flow and pressure instruments and damaged the connections for these instruments. SRR engineering evaluated the damage and was able to accept the installation as-is. SRR will begin post maintenance testing next week and they will continue into May.

3. Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board (SRS CAB):

<http://www.srs.gov/general/outreach/srs-cab/srs-cab.html>

May 19-20 meeting location:

Hilton Garden Inn Savannah Midtown
5711 Abercorn Street
Savannah, GA 31405