



Savannah River Site Watch

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Media Alert

December 4, 2015

**DOE Confirms HB-Line at SRS to Go into 24/7 Production of Plutonium Oxide for MOX Project;
Ramped-Up Effort to Meet Unrealistic Production Schedule May Create Stresses, Risks**

**Public Informed at SRS CAB Meeting on Dec. 1 that Unjustified Goal to Produce 3.7 Metric Tons of
Plutonium Oxide for NNSA Will Drive Intense Post-Incident HB-Line Operation**

Columbia, SC – The U.S. Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site (SRS) has announced that it intends to place a problem-plagued plutonium facility on a 24/7 production schedule in an attempt to meet failed production goals. The public interest group Savannah River Site Watch believes that this surprising decision may well introduce operational and personnel stresses that could impact safety.

In spite of being closed twice in 2015 for lengthy periods of time, SRS has decided to operate the HB-Line on an intense schedule designed to catch up with the goal to produce 3.7 metric tons of plutonium oxide for “feed stock” for the MOX plant now under construction at SRS.

“The decision to place HB-Line in full-throttle production after two closure incidents is questionable and could introduce stresses resulting in safety problems, according to Tom Clements, director of the public interest organization SRS Watch. “After two debilitating events at HB-Line, going into full production is imprudent and is at best premature and does not reassure the public that safety is being placed first.”

The 3.7 MT production goal was established by the DOE’s National Nuclear Security Administration and NNSA has been paying SRS (under DOE’s Office of Environmental Management) \$20 million per year as a client to reach the goal. Though NNSA may well never need any plutonium oxide if the problem-plagued MOX project is terminated, it is questionable that NNSA’s unjustified need for purified plutonium oxide is now dictating environmental operations at SRS, according to SRS Watch.

As SRS Watch has documented, only 9.6 kilograms of plutonium oxide have been produced, or only 0.3% of the already delayed goal to produce 3.7 MT by 2022.

The announcement of ramped up operational schedule of HB-Line was made by Patrick McGuire, SRS Assistant Manager for the Nuclear Material Stabilization Project. The announcement was made in a question & answer session after a presentation on the HB-Line incident by Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) on December 1 to the SRS Citizens Advisory Board’s (SRS CAB) nuclear materials committee. Four workers were terminated due to their responsibility for the September 3 incident, which resulted in a site-wide shutdown of nonessential operations by SRNS.

That interesting and informative presentation to the CAB – linked below – by a senior technical adviser with Savannah River Nuclear Solutions outlined the “willful procedure violation” by a work crew that resulted in the HB-Line’s closure. The presentation went on to outline 7 “corrective actions” that had been taken to return the HB-Line to “deliberate operations” on November 23, 2015.

In response to questions by Tom Clements of SRS Watch, Mr. McGuire said that a current 100 kilogram/year production goal would not initially be the goal. He went on to say that safety concerns would drive operation of the facility and not the production goal established by NNSA. SRS Watch will be monitoring this situation carefully and will remain concerned that production is trumping safety concerning a return to operation of HB-Line.

Notes:

HB-Line Phase III Safety Control Violation – Review of the Event, Casual Analysis and Corrective Actions – Savannah River Nuclear Solutions Update to SRS Citizens Advisory Board nuclear materials committee, December 1, 2015:

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/hb_line_presentation_to_srs_cab_dec_1_2015.pdf

SRS Watch report ***H-Canyon Folly, Plutonium Failure***, November 2015, document HB-Line line problems and plutonium oxide production failure; only 9.6 kg (0.3%) of 3.7 metric ton goal have been produced:

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/hb_line_presentation_to_srs_cab_dec_1_2015.pdf

SRS Update – HB-Line return to “deliberate operations,” November 23, 2015:

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/deliberate_operations_hb_line_srs_update_november_23_2015.pdf

Contact:

Tom Clements
SRS Watch

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

<https://www.facebook.com/SavannahRiverSiteWatch>

Columbia, SC

tel. 803-834-3084

srswatch@mail.com