



Savannah River Site Watch

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News Update

January 19, 2016

Transport Ships Involved in Controversial Plutonium Shipment from Japan to US DOE's Savannah River Site (SRS) Depart Port in Great Britain, Completion Doubtful before Nuclear Security Summit in March

Bulk of 331 Kilograms of Plutonium is of UK Origin and Must Not be Dumped at SRS - via Port of Charleston, South Carolina; No Viable Plan for its Disposition or Removal from South Carolina

Linked Below: Recent Photos of Transport Ships in Port of Barrow, UK, Including Loading Ammunition

Columbia, South Carolina, USA – A controversial plan to remove plutonium from Japan for shipment to the United States has now begun with departure of two empty transport ships from the United Kingdom. The transport mission begins under intense pressure to complete the shipment before the Nuclear Security Summit begins in Washington, DC in late March.

The UK-flagged transport ships Pacific Egret and Pacific Heron, both outfitted with deck-mounted weapons, departed their home port of Barrow-in-Furness, UK in the early morning of January 19, as informed by the UK group Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE). The ships, operated by Pacific Nuclear Transport limited (PNTL), are bound for the Tokai nuclear facility, north of Tokyo. At Tokai, 331 kilograms of plutonium that has been used for nuclear reactor research at the Fast Critical Assembly (FCA) will be loaded onto the vessels for shipment to the US. The cargo may also contain highly enriched uranium now at the FCA.

All of the plutonium, which originated in the United Kingdom, United States and France, is likely to be transported to the U.S. Department of Energy's Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina, via the military port of Charleston, South Carolina. DOE has stated that the Panama Canal will not be used on the shipment back to the US, necessitating a longer voyage around Africa or South America.

As 236 kilograms of the plutonium originated in the UK, bringing that material to SRS constitutes nuclear dumping and is not being done for nuclear non-proliferation reasons, according to the public interest group Savannah River Site Watch. At SRS, given the continued chaos in DOE's plutonium disposition program, the material will have no viable disposition path out of the site and will be placed into long-term storage in the old K-Reactor (where approximately 13 metric tons of plutonium are now stranded).

"As there is no non-proliferation or security justification for UK-origin plutonium to be taken to the Savannah River Site, the UK must deal with its own plutonium and not dump this problem on SRS," said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch.

In an environmental document prepared in secret and released at the end of 2015, the DOE's Office of Material Management & Minimization (M³), operated by the DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration, made the claim that such plutonium poses a "potential threat to nonproliferation goals...and...may not have adequately safe and secure management options." That document addressed shipment over a 7-year period to the US of 900 kilograms of plutonium now residing in seven unnamed countries, but it is believed the countries include Germany and Switzerland in addition to Japan.

As a decision was formally made at the Nuclear Security Summit in March 2014 to remove the plutonium from Japan, it is unknown why US and Japanese authorities allowed a potentially risky storage situation to continue for 2 additional years. Much of the plutonium had been stored at the FCA since its shipment to the site over 40 years ago and there was no effort to remove it until now. The question thus hangs if the shipment is actually being carried out at this time for non-proliferation or security reasons or is primarily motivated by desire to claim the shipment as a hollow non-proliferation success at the Nuclear Security Summit.

To further complicate any non-proliferation justification to be made at the Nuclear Security Summit, to be held on March 31-April in Washington, DC, Japan has a domestic stockpile of 10 metric tons of weapon-usable plutonium and the country aims to expand that amount if a new reprocessing plant at Rokkasho is ever able to operate.

"While President Obama may claim at the Nuclear Security Summit a hollow nuclear non-proliferation victory with removal of this plutonium, the fact remains that it does nothing to address the bigger proliferation concern of Japan's continued efforts to separate and stockpile yet more weapon-usable plutonium," said Tom Clements of SRS Watch. "If it is to be successful, the Nuclear Security Summit must issue a strong call for termination of Japan's spent fuel reprocessing program and demand a halt to further stockpiling of weapon-usable plutonium."

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Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE) news release, 19 January 2016: "UK ships involved in highly contentious plutonium shipment from Japan to the United States"

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/core_news_plutonium_transport_ship_uk_departure_19_january_2016.pdf

Notes:

SRS Watch news release, December 29, 2015:

"As US DOE Refuses to Act in Public Interest and Releases "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"

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srs_watch_release_draft_ea_gap_plutonium_dec_29_2015.pdf

SRS Watch news release, December 21, 2015:

“U.S. Department of Energy Quietly Gearing Up to Bring 331 Kilograms of Plutonium at "Fast Critical Assembly" 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”

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

SRS Watch report, December 21, 2015: “ DOE’S SOUTH CAROLINA PLUTONIUM DILEMMA: PLUTONIUM KEEPS SECRETLY COMING IN BUT NO VIABLE PLAN TO TAKE IT OUT;”

http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/srs_watch_plutonium_import_report_december_21_2015.pdf

DOE’s Final Environmental Assessment on “Gap Material Plutonium - Transport, Receipt, and Processing;”

<http://energy.gov/nepa/downloads/ea-2024-final-environmental-assessment>

DOE’s “Finding of No Significant Impact,” “Gap Material Plutonium - Transport, Receipt, and Processing” - December 28, 2015 - posted Dec. 29;

<http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2015/12/f27/EA-2024-FONSI-2015.pdf>

U.S. DOE “Plutonium: The First 50 Years,” February 1996:

page 69: “From 1962 to 1991, approximately 114 kg of plutonium were exported to Japan. The largest shipments occurred in 1969 and 1970 when 104 kg of plutonium in the form of reactor fuel elements and oxide were shipped to Japan, primarily to the Fast Critical Assembly at Tokai-Mura”

<http://nnsa.energy.gov/sites/default/files/nnsa/06-12-inlinefiles/Feb%201996%20PU%20The%20Frist%2050%20Years.pdf>

Communication Received from Japan Concerning its Policies Regarding the Management of Plutonium, report to the International Atomic Energy Agency via Information Circular 549, August 28, 2015, indicates a domestic stockpile of about 10 metric tons and 37 metric tons in the U.K. and France:
<https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/infcirc549a1-18.pdf>

Photos of Pacific Egret and Pacific Heron posted on SRS Watch website:
<http://www.srswatch.org/photos.html>

Unless otherwise marked, all photos should be credited as such:
“©Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”

Pacific Egret and Pacific Heron, Barrow-in-Furness, UK, January 13, 2016, Credit “©Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”
<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/4970760.jpg>

Pacific Egret with guns exposed, Barrow, January 13, 2016, Credit “©Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”
<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/3001661.jpg>

Pacific Egret, rear deck-mounted gun and seaplods (security forces), Barrow, UK, January 13, 2016, Credit “©Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”
<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/4582196.jpg>

Pacific Heron, guns and seaplods, Barrow, January 13, 2016, Credit “©Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”
<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/3685606.jpg>

Pacific Heron, red flag for ammunition loading, Barrow, January 18, 2016, Credit “©Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”
<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/3297464.jpg>

Pacific Heron, ammo loading, Barrow, January 18, 2016, Credit “©Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”
<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/103685.jpg>

ammo loading from Pacific Heron to Pacific Egret, Barrow, January 18, 2016, Credit “©Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/9182686.jpg>

Pacific Egret and Pacific Heron, Barrow, January 15, 2016, Credit “©Cumbrrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/3057472.jpg>

Pacific Egret and Pacific Heron, Barrow, December 15, 2015, Credit “©Cumbrrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/3685227.jpg>

Pacific Egret and Pacific Heron, Barrow, December 29, 2015, Credit “©Cumbrrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/2339371.jpg>

Pacific Egret and Pacific Heron, Barrow-in-Furness, UK, December 29, 2016, Credit “©Cumbrrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/7036940.jpg>

Pacific Egret and Pacific Heron, October 13, 2014, ©Savannah River Site Watch

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/8424070.jpg>

Pacific Egret, Barrow, April 10, 2013, Credit “©Cumbrrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/5160869.jpg>

Pacific Egret, Barrow, February 2, 2014, Credit “©Cumbrrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment (CORE), special to SRS Watch”

<http://www.srswatch.org/uploads/2/7/5/8/27584045/4938133.jpg>

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