



Savannah River Site Watch

Savannah River Site Watch

For immediate Release

October 28, 2015

Savannah River Site Ends Consideration of Brining Commercial Spent Fuel from the Byron Nuclear Power Plant in Illinois to SRS for Research Activities

Import of Commercial Spent Fuel to SRS Pursued in Secret, Despite Public Concern on the Matter

Columbia, SC – The Savannah River Site has halted planning to bring highly radioactive spent nuclear fuel to the site for research and development purposes. Such a controversial proposal should not have been pursued without informing the public, the State of South Carolina and the SRS Citizens Advisory Board in advance, according to the public interest group Savannah River Site Watch.

SRS had been considering bringing an unknown amount of commercial spent fuel from the Byron nuclear power plant in Illinois to SRS. Before the issue came to light, the shipping company had received approval from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for the transport route from Byron to SRS. Byron is a two-unit reactor facility and is operated by Exelon.

“SRS should never have pursued importation in secret of commercial spent fuel to the site,” said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. “Given the nuclear waste burden already at the site and public concern about importation of commercial spent fuel, SRS should halt any future consideration of bringing commercial spent fuel to SRS.”

Savannah River Site Watch discovered a June 1, 2015 letter from the NRC to Secured Transportation Services in Sugar Hill, Georgia advising the company of “ROUTE APPROVAL APPLICATION (NRC ROUTE NO. 250) ROUTE: BYRON GENERATING STATION, BYRON, IL TO THE SAVANNAH RIVER SITE, NEAR AIKEN, SC.” The approval of the shipping route was in response to an April 6 request by the company. It is unknown what other regulatory approval SRS may have sought for the shipment, import and storage of the spent fuel to SRS.

Though it is unknown what research and development had been planned for the spent fuel, likely at the Savannah River National Lab (SRNL), a DOE spokesperson in Washington informed SRS Watch, in response to an inquiry of October 26, on the evening of October 27 that

The Department is currently assessing other potential destinations for this proposed shipment. The routing request was submitted to the NRC earlier in the year when DOE was considering whether SRS could play a role in supporting the proposed research and development activities associated with used fuel from the Byron facility. Conditions have change and SRS is no longer being considered for any aspect of the proposed work.

It is believed that DOE may aim to send the spent fuel to the Oak Ridge National Lab in Tennessee or the Idaho National Lab. Opposition to shipment of commercial spent fuel to Idaho is facing strong opposition in the state, derailing DOE plans to ship an initial shipment of commercial spent fuel from the North Anna nuclear reactor site in Virginia to the lab.

It appears that the SRS Citizens Advisory Board (SRS CAB) was not informed in advance about the interest to bring the spent fuel to SRS. The CAB has expressed concern about importation of high-level waste into SRS and in July 2015 renewed its position against “interim” storage of commercial spent fuel at SRS.

In addition to stopping any further consideration of commercial spent fuel import, SRS must release to the SRS CAB and to the public full documentation on the reasons for the planned import of the spent fuel and how the waste would have been managed at the site, according to SRS Watch.

Notes:

- April 6, 2015 letter from the NRC concerning the route-approval application – note that the letter is dated April 6 but mentions an application dated April 22, for approval of the route; the application itself could not be found:

<http://pbadupws.nrc.gov/docs/ML1512/ML15125A410.pdf>

- June 1, 2015 letter from the NRC approving the shipping route:

<http://pbadupws.nrc.gov/docs/ML1515/ML15152A007.pdf>

- SRS Citizens Advisory Board renewal of position appear against bring spent fuel to SRS for interim storage, July 28, 2015: <http://www.srs.gov/general/outreach/srs-cab/library/positions/interimstorage.pdf>

- Article in Post-Register in Idaho Falls, ID on October 27: “How the spent nuclear fuel deal fell apart” -

<http://www.postregister.com/articles/news-daily-email-todays-headlines/2015/10/27/how-spent-nuclear-fuel-deal-fell-apart#> - text of article can be emailed on request

Contact:

Tom Clements
Director, SRS Watch
tel. 803-834-3084