

# ENVIRONMENTAL BULLETIN

*from the Savannah River Site*

## Recommendation to suspend ITP modifications

WSRC officials recommended to the DOE that facility modifications be suspended on part of the SRS's high-level waste management system after chemical tests failed to resolve concerns about benzene generated by that process. The suspension was recommended to further review the benzene question and identify alternatives to separating salt wastes. Benzene is an operational safety concern because it is a flammable chemical.

The process, called In-Tank Precipitation (ITP), is intended to separate high-level radioactive waste from the low-level radioactive salts contained in a large portion of the 34 million gallons of high-level waste stored at the site.

The recommendation to suspend work is not expected to result in layoffs of SRS operations workers. However, some construction workers assigned to the project could be affected. Operations workers are still needed to manage the waste currently in the ITP tanks and elsewhere on site.

The 49 waste storage tanks at SRS contain two types of high-level radioactive waste: sludge and salt. SRS is currently converting the radioactive sludge into solid glass at its Defense Waste Processing Facility. Sludge processing is expected to continue until at least the year 2005.

DOE's Savannah River Operations Office has received Westinghouse's recommendation and will be reviewing it in conjunction with DOE Headquarters and the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board.

## ROD on SRS river water system

DOE Savannah River Operations Office (DOE-SR) has issued a Record of Decision (ROD) on the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the river water system at SRS. Based on the environmental information found in the EIS and on economic and regulatory considerations, DOE-SR has decided to continue to operate and maintain the river water system for the immediate future. This will mean that L-Lake will be maintained at the current water level.

The water pumping system was built during the 1950s to provide cooling water to the site's five nuclear material production reactors. The system pumped water from the river to the reactor areas where the water passed through heat exchangers to absorb heat from the reactor cores. Though the reactors are no longer in use, the river water system continues to provide support for fire protection, the SRS sanitary waste treatment plant, and maintains the water level in L-Lake. The EIS process was initiated to study cost savings and environmental impacts associated with the operation and maintenance of the river water system.

The EIS evaluated three options:

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### Need NEPA documents?

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## FONSI, Waste Segregation Facility

To reduce the number of B-25 low-level waste storage containers used at SRS, DOE has proposed to construct a Waste Segregation Facility (WSF). In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) DOE has prepared an EA (DOE/EA-1229) for the proposed facility.

The WSF would be used to sort, shred, and compact low-level radioactive waste. The throughput, a mix of legacy and newly generated waste, is estimated at 4,500 B-25 containers annually for single shift operation. Based on the potential for impacts described in the final EA, DOE has determined that the WSF does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Therefore, DOE-SR issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) dated January 9, 1998.

## FONSI, Upgrade of Tritium facilities

DOE has proposed to modernize and consolidate the existing SRS Tritium facilities to improve safety and productivity, reduce future operating costs, and reduce the impacts to the environment. In order to evaluate the environmental consequences associated with implementing this proposed action, DOE has prepared an EA (DOE/EA-1222). Based on the potential for impacts described in the final EA, DOE has determined that the proposed facility upgrades do not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Therefore, DOE-SR issued a FONSI dated January 7, 1998.

# Cleanup proposed to F Area Retention Basin Operable Unit

The Department of Energy (DOE) recently released a Statement of Basis/Proposed Plan proposing cleanup action for the F-Area Retention Basin (FRB) Operable Unit (OU) at the SRS. SCDHEC also released a draft Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) permit modification for this unit. The plan and draft permit modification are available for public review and copying at the locations listed on Page 3. The public comment period ends March 5, 1998.

DOE, EPA and SCDHEC are recommending the following actions for the FRB:

1. The proposed alternative for the FRB soils is in-place grouting to stabilize the soil, followed by installation of a low permeability cover, and the use of industrial controls. This alternative will eliminate ingestion pathways and reduce potential leaching of contaminants from soil to groundwater. Groundwater monitoring will be provided as a component of this alternative to verify that contaminants are not leaching to groundwater. This alternative also includes deed restrictions and notifications to ensure that land use remains industrial.

2. The FRB proposed groundwater alternative is no action. The proposed alternative for the FRB soils (described above) will reduce the potential of soil leaching. Therefore, no further action is recommended for groundwater associated with the FRB.

3. The proposed alternative for the FRB process sewer line and pipeline soils is institutional controls (including posting of signs at the waste unit), pipeline grouting and soil excavation and disposition with FRB soils. This alternative includes grouting the pipeline and manholes and excavating and grouting localized areas of soil contamination around the pipeline area along with the FRB soils. This alternative also includes deed restrictions and notifications to ensure that land use remains industrial.

The FRB was constructed as an unlined, temporary retention basin that collected potentially contaminated cooling water from the F Area Canyon Facility and storm water drainage from the F Area Tank Farm. The basin operated from 1955 to 1972. In 1978, contaminated soil was removed from the basin and the basin was closed. The remedial investigation found the most significant estimated future risks and hazards to the hypothetical future resident and the hypothetical construction and industrial worker. The proposed alternative will prevent future ingestion of shallow aquifer groundwater, prevent direct contact with soils and sediments, and prevent the transfer of contamination from subsurface soils to groundwater.

Comments on the Statement of Basis/Proposed Plan and the draft RCRA permit modification are requested by March 5, 1998. All comments received will be considered and addressed in a responsiveness summary that will be made available with the Record of Decision and the final RCRA permit decision, and will be sent to each person who submits

comments.

Copies of the Statement of Basis/Proposed Plan are available in the administrative record from the information repositories listed in the box on Page 3.

Copies of the draft RCRA permit modification/s are available for review at SCDHEC during regular business hours, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except legal holidays at the following locations:

SCDHEC  
Bureau of Land and Waste Management  
8901 Farrow Road  
Columbia, S.C. 29203  
Phone: (803)896-4000

or  
SCDHEC  
Lower Savannah District  
Environmental Quality Control Office  
218 Beaufort St., N.E.  
Aiken, S.C. 29802  
Phone: (803) 641-7670

Comments on the Statement of Basis/Proposed Plan may be sent to Mary Flora and comments on the draft RCRA permit modification may be sent to John Litton. For additional information or to request a public meeting contact:

Mary A. Flora  
Westinghouse Savannah River Company  
Building 703-A  
Aiken, S.C. 29808  
1-800-249-8155  
mary.flora@srs.gov

or  
SCDHEC  
Attn: John P. Litton, P.E., Director  
Division of Hazardous and Infectious Waste Mgt. Bureau  
of Land and Waste Management  
2600 Bull Street  
Columbia, S.C. 29201  
(803) 896-4000

## INFORMATION REPOSITORIES

\* DOE Public Reading Room, Gregg-Graniteville Library, USC-Aiken, Aiken, S.C. \* Thomas Cooper Library Government Documents Department, USC-Columbia, Columbia, S.C. \* Reese Library, Augusta State University, Augusta, Ga. \* Asa H. Gordon Library, Savannah State University, Savannah, Ga.

## INTERNET ACCESS

**SRS Home Page, "What's New"**

(<http://www.srs.gov>)

**SRS Environmental Restoration Home Page**

(<http://www.srs.gov/general/sci-tech/envirorest/extpage/pub/pubinv.html>)

## Current NEPA actions affecting SRS

- **Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (DOE/EIS-0026-S2)**, The disposal phase ROD was issued January 23, 1998 (63 FR 3623).
- **Rocky Flats Plutonium Residues and Scrub Alloy (DOE/EIS-0277)**, The public comment period ended January 5, 1998. Comments are being resolved and incorporated in the final EIS.
- **Shutdown of River Water System at SRS (DOE/EIS-0268)**, The final EIS was issued May 1997, and the ROD was signed December 23, 1997.
- **Accelerator for Production of Tritium (DOE/EIS-0270)**, The comment period will close February 2, 1998. Final EIS and ROD are projected for July and August 1998, respectively.
- **Tritium Extraction Facility (DOE/EIS-0271)**, Publication of the draft EIS is projected for March 1998 and final EIS and ROD for August and September 1998, respectively.
- **DOE Waste Management (DOE/EIS-0200)**, Multiple RODs will be issued. The TRU ROD was issued January 23, 1998 (63 FR 3629). Planned RODs are HLW storage in March 1998, LLW/LLMW in June 1998.
- **SRS Spent Nuclear Fuel (DOE/EIS-0279)**, Work on draft EIS is expected to resume April or May 1998.
- **Surplus Plutonium Disposition (DOE/EIS-0282)**, The draft EIS is scheduled for February 1998.
- **Wetland Mitigation Bank Program (DOE/EA-1205)**, Preparation of the draft EA is progressing with a proposed issue date of first quarter 1998.
- **Tritium Facility Modernization/Consolidation Project (DOE/EA-1222)**, A FONSI was issued January 7, 1998.
- **Reuse of TNX as a Multi-Purpose Pilot Plant Project Campus (DOE/EA-1231)**, The predecisional draft EA was issued to South Carolina and Georgia on December 16, 1997, for review and comment.
- **Waste Segregation Facility (WSF) (DOE/EA-1229)**, The FONSI was issued January 9, 1998.

## (River Water System, from page 1)

continue to operate the river water system; shut down, but maintain the system for potential restart; or shut down and deactivate the system with no maintenance for potential restart.

Shutting down the river water system would have eventually lowered the level of the 1,000-acre, man-made, L-Lake that was created to disperse and cool water used in L-Reactor when it was in operation.

The river water system will continue in operation while DOE-SR completes characterization of L-Lake under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act. This characterization work will commence by the year 2000.

DOE has an agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control that provides a commitment and schedule for the comprehensive remediation of contamination at SRS, including SRS streams and lakes. Sediments that contain low-level radionuclides remain under the lake, primarily in the former Steel Creek stream bed. The contaminated sediments were deposited prior to the creation of L-Lake in 1985.

By selecting the continued operation of the river water system alternative, pending completion of characterization activities, DOE-SR will be able to determine the best ultimate course of action for the river water system.

For copies of the Record of Decision, contact Andrew Grainer (see box on page 1), or call Gail Jernigan, 1(800) 881-7292.

## NEW PHONE NUMBERS

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