

NEWS from The Savannah River Site



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For immediate release

FINAL REMEDIATION PLAN SET FOR SRS'S OLD RADIOACTIVE WASTE BURIAL GROUND

AIKEN, S.C. (Oct. 9)—The final clean-up of the highest priority waste site at the Savannah River Site can begin shortly, thanks to an agreement among the Department of Energy (DOE), South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) signed last month.

The Old Radioactive Waste Burial Ground has the Site's highest concentration of radionuclides that could be released to the environment. "We are moving quickly to reduce the risk and achieve final closure, putting the brakes on migration of wastes into groundwater," said Thomas F. Heenan, Assistant Manager for Environment, Science, and Technology for the Department of Energy's Savannah River Operations Office.

Through a Record of Decision signed by the EPA and SCDHEC, the plan calls for the consolidation of radioactive waste materials. These materials are mostly soils from four relatively small nearby waste sites, which will be added into the Old Radioactive Waste Burial Ground.

With the incorporation of waste materials from the smaller waste sites, the Burial Ground closure will then be called the General Separations Area Consolidation Unit. A protective geo-synthetic cap will be placed over the Burial Ground, followed by a layer of soil and vegetation. The decision to cap the unit protects workers from the risks of exposure that would exist using more invasive options. A project is already operating to reduce tritium (radioactive hydrogen) migration via groundwater to a site stream from the Burial Ground.

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“This Record of Decision is a major milestone for our largest remediation project,” said Mike Sabbe, Vice President and General Manager of Environmental Restoration for Bechtel Savannah River Inc.. “We will now complete the closure design and cap this high risk waste site with a long-term protective cover.”

Continued institutional controls will ensure the cover is properly maintained and intruders kept out. When it becomes necessary or desirable to end institutional controls, perhaps in 100 years, intruder barriers will be installed over certain areas containing elevated amounts of persistent contamination.

Most of the Burial Ground already has a soil cover because of a 1996 interim action. An exception is the area around 22 old buried solvent tanks, which are now being filled with grout and will be left in place—the last part of the Burial Ground to be remediated. That interim action is scheduled to be completed in 2003.

The Burial Ground, last used in 1974, is a 76-acre disposal area for solid radioactive waste. The greatest volume of the waste was low-level incidental waste from laboratory and production operations, including small equipment, spent air filters, clothes, analytical waste, decontamination residues, plastic sheeting, gloves, soil, and construction debris. Most of the wastes disposed of there were placed in drums, cans, cardboard boxes, plastic bags, and metal containers and buried in earthen trenches about 20 feet deep. The remedy will prevent intrusion of rainwater and therefore limit migration of the contaminants.

The Savannah River Site is owned by DOE and operated by Westinghouse Savannah River Company of Washington Group International and its partners—Bechtel Savannah River Inc., BNFL Savannah River Corporation, and BWXT Savannah River Company, Inc.

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