

NEWS from The Savannah River Site



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For immediate release

F AREA FACILITIES COMPLETE PROCESSING OF LEGACY MATERIALS

AIKEN, S.C., March 27 – After 50 years of service to the nation, the F Canyon and FB Line facilities at the Savannah River Site have completed their last production run to process legacy SRS materials. For nearly half a century, F Canyon and FB Line have processed most of the plutonium that makes up the United States nuclear arsenal.

There are no current plans to process additional materials in F Canyon, although that capability remains available.

F Canyon and FB Line, both located in the site's F Area, are two of SRS's four chemical separations facilities; the other two are H Canyon and HB Line. The F Area facilities historically recovered plutonium, through a chemical process, from material that had been irradiated in SRS reactors. The canyon dissolves the material from the reactor into a solution and then purifies and concentrates the solution; FB Line makes the solution into metal buttons, about the size and shape of a hockey puck.

FB Line, although planned operations associated with the PUREX process are complete, has at least three years of full operations remaining. Unless additional feed materials are identified, F Canyon will now enter a suspension phase where the facility will be cleaned up and all hazards removed. Once complete, associated personnel will be transferred to other facilities, such as H Canyon and HB Line, says F Canyon Facility Manager Phil Breidenbach.

“The ultimate goal is to finish work in F Area facilities as quickly as possible and use the money saved to further accelerate the site’s Environmental Management missions,” Breidenbach says. “We’ll need our employees’ unique expertise to complete this work.”

“There’s a reason why SRS is considered the plutonium cornerstone of the DOE complex,” agrees Bill Johnson, vice president and general manager of the Nuclear Materials Management Division, which operates F Canyon and FB Line for Westinghouse Savannah River Company. “It’s the people who have achieved safe, disciplined operations for decades.”

Ideally, F Area operations will gradually conclude on about the same timetable as new missions begin to staff up, Breidenbach says. That philosophy has worked well in this first stage. Some F Canyon personnel will transfer to H Canyon in May, where a new mission is ramping up to blend down highly enriched uranium, formerly used in SRS reactors, into low-enriched uranium, which will eventually be used as fuel in Tennessee Valley Authority power reactors.

SRS is owned by DOE and operated by a team of companies led by WSRC.

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