NEWS from
The Savannah River Site

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For Immediate Release

SAFE CLOSURE COMPLETE AT THE LAST UNDERGROUND SOLVENT TANK IN SRS'S OLD RADIOACTIVE WASTE BURIAL GROUND

AIKEN, S.C. (March 3) — The final grout placement in a radioactive underground solvent tank last week marks another closure milestone at the Savannah River Site. Since work began in November 2001, workers have safely placed more than 1550 cubic yards of grout in 22 tanks.

"This was an enormous task," says Ed McNamee, Project Manager. "It took almost 200 average size concrete trucks to completely fill these tanks, and each grout pour required careful planning for the hazardous radiological conditions each tank presented."

Filling the tanks with grout stabilizes their structural integrity and fixes remaining contaminants in place. The tanks are located in the Old Radioactive Waste Burial Ground (ORWBG), which has a high concentration of radionuclides that must be shielded from the environment. A recent Record of Decision signed by the Environmental Protection Agency and South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control requires the burial ground and tanks to be covered with a protective synthetic cap followed by a layer of soil and vegetation to complete final closure. The decision to cap the unit protects workers from exposure that would exist using more invasive options.

These tanks were used until the mid-1970s to store spent radioactive solvent and aqueous wastes generated from the plutonium/uranium extraction (PUREX) process. Completing the tank closures allows SRS personnel to finish plans for the final closure actions at the burial ground complex, which is scheduled to begin in December 2003. Most of the burial ground already has a soil cover because of another interim action completed in 1996. Completing the final cover system over the entire burial ground is scheduled for December 2007.

The Burial Ground, last used in 1974, is a 76-acre radioactive waste disposal area. 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 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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