

NEWS from The Savannah River Site



Media Contact: Dean Campbell
(803) 725-5481

For Immediate Release

FIRST DWPF MELTER ENDS SUCCESSFUL RUN AFTER SAFELY OPERATING MORE THAN THREE TIMES ITS DESIGN LIFE

AIKEN, S.C., (October 18, 2002) – The heart of the Savannah River Site’s Defense Waste Processing Facility, its 65-ton melter, is being replaced after an extensive operating run of more than three times its design life.

The melter was estimated to have a design life of about two years when it was installed during testing in 1994. Today, after more than eight years of continuous operation, including six years of radioactive operations, the original melter is being shut down, and a new melter will be installed to continue vitrification of the site’s high-level waste inventory.

“This is an incredible operational run for this melter,” said Steve Piccolo, vice president and general manager of the WSRC High Level Waste Division. “It’s a tribute to our employees who work so hard to keep the facility safely operating and getting the most from the equipment.”

The plan has been to operate the melter as long as possible, giving engineers a chance to observe how the melter can falter in its later life and what to look for in future melter operation.

A decision was made this week to end the melter’s operation since several recent equipment issues are affecting the facility throughput. An associated heater stopped working and the Slurry Mix Evaporator (SME) is in need of replacement. The heaters help keep the pool of super-heated waste in the melter hot. The SME is a 10,000-gallon, stainless steel vessel that is used in the DWPF process to mix ground frit, a borosilicate glass, with high-level waste.

(more)

The second melter is ready to be put into place. Since the new melter is the first to be changed during radioactive operations, it's estimated that it will take four to six months to remove the old melter, install the new one, test it and return to normal operations. All operations have to be conducted remotely to protect workers from radiation.

By safely extending the original melter's useful life, SRS has saved millions in taxpayer dollars and stays on course to empty waste tanks. Melters cost about \$20 million each.

Since radioactive operations began in March 1996 at DWPF, 1,337 canisters, or about 27 percent of the projected 5,000 canisters, have been poured. Consistent with the Performance Management Plan, it is expected to take less than 20 years from now to turn the entire site inventory of high-level waste into glass.

The site is owned by the U.S. Department of Energy and operated by a team of contractors led by the Westinghouse Savannah River Company.

WSRC-02-050