

# NEWS from The Savannah River Site

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### SRS ACCELERATES SHIPMENTS OF NUCLEAR WASTE TO NEW MEXICO

AIKEN, S.C. (September 22, 2003) – The Savannah River Site has reached another milestone in the removal of nuclear waste from the site, sending its 200<sup>th</sup> shipment to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico last Friday.

In reaching this milestone, the site also reached a new peak in the rate that it is shipping this type of nuclear waste, called “transuranic” or “TRU” waste, out of South Carolina. The site, which began shipping its transuranic waste to New Mexico in 2001, is now making 24 shipments per month, compared to the one shipment per month they were making two years ago, and the eight per month they were making just one year ago.

“Our people have been working diligently to speed up the pace of these shipments, well beyond what we could have imagined when we started 2 ½ years ago,” says Sam Kelly, president of BNFL Savannah River Corp. “Now, with 24 truckloads going out of here each month, we are getting rid of this waste at a speed that will allow us to meet our goal of removing all of the currently stored TRU waste by 2006.” When Westinghouse Savannah River Company and its partner companies signed a new contract with the Department of Energy earlier this year for the continued management of SRS, they agreed to goals that will accelerate cleanup of the site by 2006.

Transuranic waste consists of clothing, tools, rags, residues, debris and other items contaminated with small quantities of radioactive elements heavier than uranium – hence the term “transuranic.” SRS TRU waste primarily includes items with trace amounts of plutonium. WIPP is a government-owned geologic repository specifically constructed for the safe permanent disposal of transuranic waste. U.S. Department of Energy sites across the country have begun sending their TRU waste to WIPP.

(more)

## WASTE SHIPMENT MILESTONE

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“Through acceleration and implementation of new process lines, the team has more than tripled the shipping rates of a year ago,” says Kelly. “In April, we celebrated our 100<sup>th</sup> shipment – a milestone it took us two years to reach. Now, just six months later, we’re celebrating our second hundred.”

In 2001, the site sent a total of seven shipments to New Mexico, sending 43 more in 2002. In 2003, the site expects to make 216 total shipments. At this rate, the site expects to finish shipping the remaining 10,000 cubic meters of currently stored waste by 2006, compared to the original target date of 2034.

“The acceleration of the ‘Ship to WIPP’ program is a tremendous achievement for the site, made possible by excellent cooperation among the WSRC team, DOE and WIPP,” says Charlie Hansen, DOE-Savannah River Assistant Manager, Waste Disposition Project. DOE, for its part, made available additional specially-designed transport trucks to accommodate the shipments. SRS has made several changes to its processes, including going to an around-the-clock schedule, and building a new, enhanced loading bay.

The WSRC Team operates and manages SRS for DOE. BNFL Savannah River Corp., a partnering company with the WSRC Team, is responsible for the site’s Solid Waste Program, which includes the TRU waste program.

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NOTE: Still photography of SRS personnel loading the 200<sup>th</sup> shipment is available from the media contact listed above.