

Media Contact: Angeline French
(803) 952-8671
angeline.french@srs.gov

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SRS REACHES WASTE DISPOSAL MILESTONE

AIKEN, S.C. (March 10, 2004) – The Savannah River Site (SRS) has reached another milestone in the shipment of waste to a Department of Energy (DOE) facility in New Mexico for safe, permanent disposal. On Monday, the site shipped its 10,000th drum of transuranic waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad. As a result of the site's accelerated cleanup efforts, this 10,000-drum milestone comes 12 years ahead of the original schedule.

Like other DOE sites, SRS stored its transuranic waste (called “TRU” waste) onsite until WIPP opened in 1999. SRS began shipments of waste from its 11,000-cubic-meter inventory in 2001.

The site currently makes six shipments per week to WIPP, with approximately 30 drums per shipment, a dramatic increase from the one-shipment-per-month schedule initiated in 2001. "Our people have been able to keep up the six shipments per week, despite the fact that we have begun working with the site's inventory of higher-activity waste, which is more complicated to work with," says Sam Kelly, manager of the site's Solid Waste & Infrastructure Project Area. "Plus - and this is most important to us - we have maintained this pace while continuing to work safely."

The drums of higher-activity waste have been stored in concrete culverts, so before Solid Waste personnel can begin preparing them for shipment, they must retrieve them from the culverts and perform a "vent and purge" process, to remove hydrogen and other gases that may have built up in the drums during storage. Then, like all of the other drums that have been shipped to WIPP, they are characterized to make sure they do not contain items that are not acceptable for disposal at WIPP (such as aerosol cans or liquids). Any drums containing prohibited articles are "remediated" - opened and the prohibited articles removed prior to shipment.

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THE WSRC TEAM

Westinghouse Savannah River Company LLC · Bechtel Savannah River, Inc. · BNFL Savannah River Corporation
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10,000th Drum Shipped from SRS
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SRS has undertaken several initiatives to make it possible to maintain this accelerated schedule. Twenty-six employees from other work groups from across the site were quickly reassigned and retrained to perform operations related to shipping TRU waste to WIPP. In January, the characterization and remediation work became 24-hour-per-day operations. Vent-and-purge operations will also soon become 24-hour operations. The site has also identified an existing on-site facility that can be used to expand capabilities for remediating drums.

TRU waste means waste that is contaminated with man-made radioactive elements that have an atomic number greater than that of uranium. At SRS, TRU waste consists of clothing, tools, rags, residues, debris and other items contaminated with small quantities of these elements – primarily trace amounts of plutonium.

In 1999, DOE opened WIPP, a geologic repository near Carlsbad, New Mexico, specifically constructed for the permanent disposal of TRU waste from DOE sites across the nation. Prior to WIPP's opening, SRS – like the other DOE sites – stored its TRU waste in on-site waste management facilities. Approximately 11,000 cubic meters of waste was stored in drums and large containers primarily on TRU waste storage pads in the Solid Waste Management Facility.

In 2001, SRS began shipping its TRU waste to WIPP. Original plans called for shipping all of SRS' stored TRU waste by the year 2034. In 2002, however, the site adopted aggressive new goals that would allow all shipments to be completed by 2014, moving this waste into safe permanent disposal 20 years ahead of schedule, and saving the taxpayer \$700 million.