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For Immediate Release
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Improved Saltstone Facilities Restart Operations

AIKEN, S.C. (September 6, 2012) – The Saltstone Facilities at the Savannah River Site (SRS) have restarted operations following a nine-month planned improvement outage. The facilities process and dispose of decontaminated salt solution, reducing the risk of potential contamination in the environment.

Improvements to the facilities are expected to provide a new and more reliable system to process larger amounts of decontaminated salt solution needed for future tank closure operations, according to Steve Wilkerson, Savannah River Remediation (SRR) Waste Treatment Manager.

“We expect the Saltstone Facilities to be even more robust as we position the Site for continued success in closing waste tanks,” Wilkerson said. “The improvements will support a 24/7 work schedule, which will be necessary when the Salt Waste Processing Facility begins operations.”

The improvement outage, called Enhanced Low Activity Waste Disposal (ELAWD), began in December 2011, and culminated a year when the facility processed nearly 1.5 million gallons of waste. Since beginning operations in June 1990, Saltstone has processed over 10 million gallons of low-level salt waste. For fiscal year 2012, which ends this month, the improved facilities will process more than 800,000 gallons of salt waste.

Terrel Spears, Assistant Manager for Waste Disposition Project, U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)-Savannah River Operations Office, said Saltstone must operate reliably.

“DOE’s ultimate priority is to operationally close our tank farm system and reduce risk. The Saltstone operations are a critical component of DOE achieving that mission,” Spears said. “The liquid waste program employees are demonstrating real progress in the safe removal and permanent disposition of the low-activity salt waste.”

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During ELAWD, new production equipment and process lines were added in an upgraded process room, which will improve the production facility's mixing and waste transfer system. The new transfer system will send a cement-like grout powders to a large mixer, where the cement substance is mixed with the low-level salt waste. From there, the material will go to a small surge tank called a hopper, which was redesigned as part of the enhancements to provide more efficient control and monitoring of the production process.

Saltstone facilities will experience less downtime between runs because system improvements were made to eliminate the buildup and solidification of grout inside the system, something that cause the facilities to be in an outage for four to six weeks, according to Dave Olson, SRR President and Project Manager.

"In the past between runs, we would experience blockage in the process lines due to grout solidifying in the system," Olson said. "The new reliability improvements are expected to eliminate any unnecessary downtime and will support the liquid waste operations long-term salt processing goals, which in turn will support our tank closure initiative."

The nearly $8 million in improvements will position the Saltstone facilities for continuous operations and up to 12 million gallons of salt solution per year when the Salt Waste Processing Facility begins operations.

SRS is owned by DOE. The SRS Liquid Waste contract is managed by SRR, a team of companies led by URS Corp. with partners Bechtel National, CH2M Hill and Babcock & Wilcox. Critical subcontractors for the contract are AREVA, Energy Solutions and URS Safety Management Solutions.

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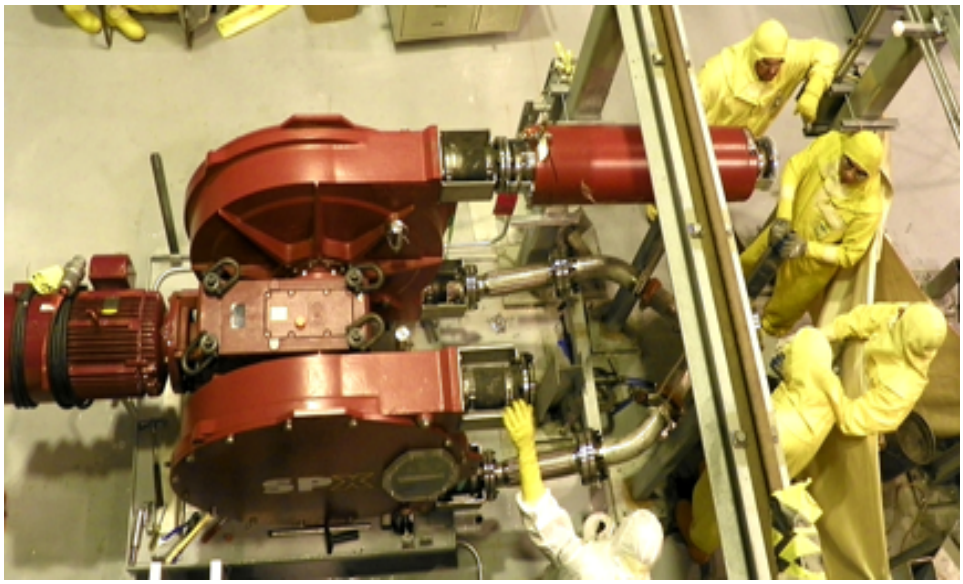

PHOTO CAPTION

Savannah River Remediation employees install new equipment in the Saltstone Process Room during the recent outage.