

Primary Media Contact:
Holly Kemp
Savannah River Nuclear Solutions
(803) 952-2031, holly.kemp@srs.gov

NNSA Media Contact:
Bryan Cox
NNSA – Savannah River Field Office
(803) 989-9050, bryan.cox@nnsa.srs.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SRS Begins Dismantle and Removal Phase for Savannah River Plutonium Processing Facility

AIKEN, S.C. (Feb. 2, 2023) – The Savannah River Site (SRS) is moving forward with the next step in preparing the Savannah River Plutonium Processing Facility (SRPPF) for its future national security mission.

After months of planning and preparation, the SRPPF project is proceeding with its first “hands on” work involving local trade unions to dismantle and remove (D&R) equipment not suitable for the production of plutonium pits such as HVAC ducts, piping, electrical conduits, pumps, tanks and gloveboxes throughout Building 226-F located in the site’s F Area. Existing coatings also will be removed from the concrete walls, floors, and ceilings.

“This is an important day for all of us because achieving this D&R milestone is the next step to move the pit production mission forward at SRS,” said Stuart MacVean, President and Chief Executive Officer for Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, the site’s managing and operations contractor.

Once built and operational testing is complete, the purpose of the SRPPF will be the manufacturing of plutonium pits for the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). A plutonium pit is a critical component of every nuclear weapon.

“From a national security standpoint, pit production is considered to be the No. 1 priority for the NNSA,” MacVean said. “We have a tremendous amount of support to be able to meet that mission, from the federal government, the White House and Congress.”



Craft workers use a crane to safely remove commodities, such as piping and conduit and other equipment, from Building 226-F as officials with Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, the National Nuclear Security Administration and AECON-WACHS gather to observe the progress on repurposing the structure for the pit production mission at the Savannah River Site.

The plutonium pit production mission is an essential part of the NNSA’s long-term strategy for nuclear stockpile sustainment. Under federal law and to meet national security requirements, NNSA must be able to produce no fewer than 80 pits per year to maintain and replenish the nuclear stockpile. Responsibilities for manufacturing 80 pits per year will be shared between two sites: Los Alamos National Laboratory, which must produce 30 pits per year; and SRS, which will be responsible for producing the remaining 50.

Building 226-F, a 500,000-square-foot concrete structure, was originally designed to dispose of surplus weapons-grade plutonium, converting it into fuel assemblies for use in commercial nuclear power plants.

D&R crews are now working to safely dismantle and remove commodities, such as piping and conduit and other equipment, from the structure without damaging the configuration of items projected for reuse.

“Repurposing Building 226-F was considered at our top levels of government,” said Scott Cannon, NNSA Federal Project Director. “Time was really one of the bigger factors with needing this facility and capability to come on-line as fast as possible.”

The construction process is scheduled to be completed as close to 2030 as possible, with the first two years dedicated to the D&R process. All items and debris removed from the building will be recycled or disposed of off-site.

“This material removal is really critical to constructing SRPPF,” Cannon said. “We’ve got a plan for all of the commodities and equipment that we need to remove so we can put the new equipment in. That’s really the importance of D&R.”

SRNS selected the contractor AECON-WACHS to lead the D&R effort for SRPPF.

“We’ve asked AECON-WACHS, a local contractor right out of Jackson, S.C., to take on this scope of work,” MacVean said. “They gave us the best overall competitive bid to tackle the job. They’re making really great progress at this stage of the game.”

Keith Willingham, AECON-WACHS Vice President and General Manager, said materials are being removed from the facility in numerous ways.

“We’re doing a lot of manual take out,” Willingham said. “Part of that removal will be with rough terrain cranes, and we have engineered an elevator system where we’ll be bringing materials out in skid pans and getting them ready for removal off-site.”

SRNS entered into a Project Labor Agreement (PLA) in October with the Augusta Building and Construction Trades Council, which is comprised of 19 local unions. The agreement is in support of the construction of the SRPPF.

“As D&R begins, there is a total of around 81 craft workers on-site with another 30 to 35 non-manual workers,” said W. Gordon Scott, D&R Execution Project Manager, SRPPF. “The peak number for D&R is looking to get around 150 craft and up to 40 to 50 non-manual.”

There are approximately 2,500 construction and trade union jobs to fill for the entire SRPPF project. Once the construction of the facility is completed, the enduring plutonium pit production mission will continue to employ approximately 1,800 people.

The SRPPF mission is an essential part of the NNSA’s long-term strategy for modernizing the nation’s nuclear deterrent.

“It kind of reminds me of the Manhattan Project,” MacVean said. “The government decided they had a real mission to get done and set up special teams to make that happen. And that’s exactly what’s going on here.”

Established by Congress in 2000, NNSA is a semi-autonomous agency within the U.S. Department of Energy

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responsible for enhancing national security through the military application of nuclear science. NNSA maintains and enhances the safety, security, and effectiveness of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile; works to reduce the global danger from weapons of mass destruction; provides the U.S. Navy with safe and militarily effective nuclear propulsion; and responds to nuclear and radiological emergencies in the U.S. and abroad.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor-led company with Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, is responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy's Savannah River Site located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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