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For Immediate Release

SRS NEARS COMPLETION IN ANOTHER WASTE TANK CLEANING

AIKEN, S.C., (April 2, 2009) – At the U.S. Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site, the cleaning of a 1.3 million-gallon radioactive waste tank is nearing completion.

The final planned cleaning step for this tank, known as Tank 18, has been conducted using a new robotic device, known as a Sand Mantis, which began its work in January. The Sand Mantis is designed to remove the residual waste (known as a heel) from inside the radioactive liquid waste tank, after other cleaning steps have removed the bulk waste.

“Nearing completion of Tank 18 cleaning is a significant achievement at SRS,” said Terrel Spears, Assistant Manager for Waste Disposition Project, DOE-Savannah River Operations Office. “We’re pleased that the cleaning process has removed more waste than we had anticipated. We’ll continue to work with State and Federal regulators to ensure the waste removal process meets all our expectations so the Site can begin preparing the tank for final closure activities.”

Prior to previous cleaning efforts, the tank contained waste nearly to its 1.3 million gallon capacity. When this mechanical cleaning step began on Tank 18, more than 6,700 gallons of waste remained in the bottom of the waste tank. The Sand Mantis has removed the majority of that waste.

Dave Olson, Washington Savannah River Company (WSRC) Executive Vice President, said SRS is progressing well toward closing additional waste tanks.

“Ultimately, safely closing waste tanks is our highest priority work,” Olson said. “The Tank 18 cleaning demonstrates our employees continue to understand and safely accomplish our work.”

The Sand Mantis process removes the residual waste through a water-jet system that transfers the waste to a milling machine and grinds the waste into smaller particles that can easily be removed for future processing and treatment.

The Sand Mantis vacuums waste from the tank by spraying ultra high-pressure water jets through tiny openings made of synthetic gem material. The piece of equipment is 8 feet long and weighs approximately 800 pounds.

(more)

The WSRC Team:

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Sand Mantis

The Sand Mantis cross-shaped body can be collapsed into a straight line so it can be put into small openings at a tank top. Once inside the tank, it unfolds and is guided by remote control.

The device is being used in two of the Site's tanks, Tanks 18 and 19, which are no longer in use. The device has just begun its work in Tank 19. Both tanks are scheduled to be operationally closed ahead of the Federal Facilities Agreement requirement of 2012.

Safely closing waste tanks involves an intricate set of steps that includes emptying the waste tanks of bulk waste, then removing as much of the remaining heel waste as practical through various technologies and techniques, and demonstrating that the closure is protective of human health and the environment. Once that step is complete, the tanks can be filled with grout, a cement-like material created especially for these waste tanks. This grouting process is designed to stabilize the tank and protect the environment.

SRS is owned by DOE. The Liquid Waste contract is managed by a team of contractors led by WSRC, a subsidiary of URS Washington Division.

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