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MAJOR CONSTRUCTION COMPLETED AT TRITIUM EXTRACTION FACILITY

AIKEN, S.C. (Jan. 27)—The Savannah River Site recognized the completion of construction of the Tritium Extraction Facility’s major process systems at a noon ceremony today.

Brig. Gen. Ronald J. Haeckel, principal deputy administrator for defense programs for the National Nuclear Security Administration in Washington, D.C., led the observance for the NNSA.

The \$506 million project, a key part of the supply system for the nation’s nuclear weapons stockpile, is forecast to start operations about 10 months ahead of the baseline schedule. The facility will be used to extract tritium (a radioactive form of hydrogen) from materials irradiated in Tennessee Valley Authority commercial nuclear reactors. Tritium is essential for modern nuclear weapons but it decays rapidly and must be replenished.

“We are very proud of TEF’s early construction completion. We will now move into 20 months of start-up testing and readiness assessments.” said Chuck Spencer, Westinghouse Savannah River Company’s manager of defense programs. “The construction was not only completed early, but more importantly, it was

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completed safely. We look forward to the start of hydrogen testing in April, and commissioning the facility in 2006. Our critical ability to re-supply the nation's tritium will then be restored."

"There are many challenges ahead," said Gen. Haeckel, "in getting this unique operation running, but we're confident of success. We're grateful for the excellent performance of the construction forces in safely providing a top-quality product."

About 90 percent of the facility's systems have been turned over for startup testing, the next step toward completion of the project.

A U.S. flag, the DOE flag and a facility banner were raised in commemoration of the event by SRS employees recently back from reserve duty in Iraq.

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