



News from the Savannah River National Laboratory

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Girls to be Introduced to Engineering

Aiken, S.C. – At “Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day,” Saturday, April 21, engineers from the Savannah River Site will take one small step toward easing the approaching shortage of workers skilled in the engineering disciplines.

During this day-long event, to be held at USC-Aiken’s Ruth Patrick Science Center, approximately 40 girls from 17 middle schools will try their hands at engineering demonstrations and learn more about careers in engineering.

“Unless they have a parent who is an engineer, girls this age are not likely to give much thought to ‘engineering’ as a career option,” says Susan Wood, director of the Savannah River Site’s applied research and development laboratory. “We want to give them a reason to add it to the careers they are considering.”

The day will include games to help girls discover where their interests lay, and hands-on activities to show them how their natural problem-solving abilities form the basis for many engineering skills.

“Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day” is an offshoot of National Engineers Week, which was celebrated across the country – including SRS – earlier this year.

According to National Engineers Week organizers, America – along with the rest of the globe – is facing in the coming years an unprecedented shortage of workers skilled in the engineering disciplines and the sciences. The U.S. Labor Department estimates that there will be 5.3 million new high-tech jobs to fill over the next eight years. Unless the nation is able to tap into previously under-utilized talent pools, there is little hope of solving this shortage.

While women make up about half of the workforce as a whole, they are fewer than 10 percent of the nation’s engineers. That means, Dr. Wood says, that females represent a huge untapped talent pool for future engineers and scientists.

One of the reasons that so few females go into engineering is that they do not receive adequate math and science education in high school. That’s the reason for focusing on middle-school girls, Dr. Wood says. “If we catch their interest now, they will see a reason to sign up for the math and science courses they need in high school,” she says. “The more math and science they take, the broader their options.”

Jaclyn Spear of SRS, national past president of the Society of Women Engineers, says that the day’s events are the first step toward establishing a mentoring program. “Girls need active, continuing encouragement to follow the interests that lead to careers in engineering and technology,” Spear says. “They need to be encouraged by

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their parents and teachers. They also need mentors who have 'been there' and can give them both guidance and moral support, as well as serving as examples of what careers in engineering can be like."

The Society of Women Engineers is helping to sponsor the local event, with support from Westinghouse Savannah River Company, USCA - Ruth Patrick Science Education Center, British Nuclear Fuels Limited, Westinghouse Safety Management Services, Bechtel Savannah River Inc., BWX Technologies, American Nuclear Society, and CSRA – American Society for Engineering Management.

(NOTE: Agenda for the day is attached. Media wishing to attend should call the media contact listed above by Friday, April 20.)

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