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Direct Waste Transfers Optimize Process at Savannah River Site

AIKEN, S.C. (March 27, 2024) – [The Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management \(EM\)](#)'s liquid waste contractor at the [Savannah River Site \(SRS\)](#) this month marked the first direct transfer of decontaminated waste from the [Salt Waste Processing Facility \(SWPF\)](#) to the Saltstone Production Facility (SPF), an important new step in optimizing waste processing.

Savannah River Mission Completion (SRMC) streamlined the inter-area waste transfers by directly routing them from one waste processing facility to another, bypassing a holding tank in H Tank Farm, one of two groupings of underground waste tanks at SRS.

SWPF separates and concentrates the highly radioactive waste components found in the [SRS Tank Farms](#) — such as uranium, plutonium and cesium — from the less radioactive salt solution.

The concentrated high-activity waste from SWPF is sent to the [Defense Waste Processing Facility](#) to be vitrified into a solid glass form suitable for long-term storage and disposal. The decontaminated salt solution (DSS) from SWPF is sent to SPF where it is mixed with dry materials to create a grout, which is then poured into [Saltstone Disposal Units](#) to harden into a form safe for permanent onsite disposal.

Previously, the DSS from SWPF was transferred first to Tank 50 before proceeding to SPF for final treatment and disposal. At 1.3 million gallons, Tank 50 is one of the site's larger tanks with the capacity to hold the throughput of material temporarily when SPF is not processing.

Tank 50 was initially needed since SPF operated only four days week, and SWPF is a 24/7 facility. Without a hold tank between the two areas, transfers would become backlogged throughout the liquid waste system. SPF has now transitioned to 24/7 operations to support the increased production rate of DSS from SWPF.

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SWPF was originally designed to transfer DSS directly to SPF, so no physical modifications were required on transfer lines. Programming and procedural changes were made to make the direct transfers possible. SRMC will maintain the capability to use Tank 50 as a hold tank if needed during times when SPF cannot accept DSS, such as facility outages.

Rerouting waste on a direct path between processing facilities simplifies the transfer process and minimizes operational impacts on the liquid waste system, according to Jim Folk, DOE-Savannah River assistant manager for waste disposition.

“EM’s tank waste cleanup mission is moving forward faster and more efficiently now that all liquid waste facilities are operating 24/7,” Folk said. “These facilities work as an integrated system, so it is crucial that management and personnel communicate and coordinate activities to ensure all operations, especially waste transfers between areas, are completed safely and effectively.”

The option to send waste transfers directly from SWPF to SPF adds a tremendous amount of flexibility to operations, according to Wyatt Clark, SRMC chief operations officer.

“One of SRMC’s primary goals and core values is reliability,” Clark said. “Optimizing waste transfers is just another example that we are ensuring that our systems are robust, reliable and well equipped to complete the mission for the Department of Energy. Furthermore, this approach reduces the number of transfers between SWPF, Tank 50 and SPF by 50%, which is a significant benefit that resulted from the [consolidation of Effluent Treatment Facility and SPF staffing](#).”



First direct transfer of decontaminated salt solution from the Salt Waste Processing Facility to Saltstone complete

Savannah River Mission Completion successfully made the first transfer of decontaminated salt solution directly from one waste processing facility to another, bypassing a hold tank previously used in the transfer process.