News from the Savannah River Site
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Media Contacts:
Sonya Goines, U.S. Department of Energy
(803) 646-2788
Sonya.Goines@srs.gov

Colleen Hart, SRMC
(803) 208-2426
Colleen.Hart@srs.gov

Savannah River Waste Vitrification Plant Celebrates 30 Years of Operation

AIKEN, S.C. (March 12, 2026) — For the last 30 years, the waste vitrification plant at Savannah River Site (SRS) has been transforming radioactive liquid material into a solid form safe for long term storage.

The Defense Waste Processing Facility (DWPF) at the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Environmental Management (EM) site has been in operation since March 12, 1996, when former Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary officially commenced radioactive operations with the historic push of a button.

The first canister of vitrified high-level radioactive waste was poured six weeks later. Since then, DWPF has produced more than 17 million pounds of glass, filling just over 4,500 canisters, which is more than half of the canisters expected to be filled.

Tony Robinson, DOE-Savannah River acting assistant manager for waste disposition, said DWPF has been a model for EM's mission to remediate legacy waste.

"For many years, DWPF was the only operating waste vitrification plant in the nation," Robinson said. "The success of this facility benefited similar waste stabilization and disposal technologies across the DOE complex."

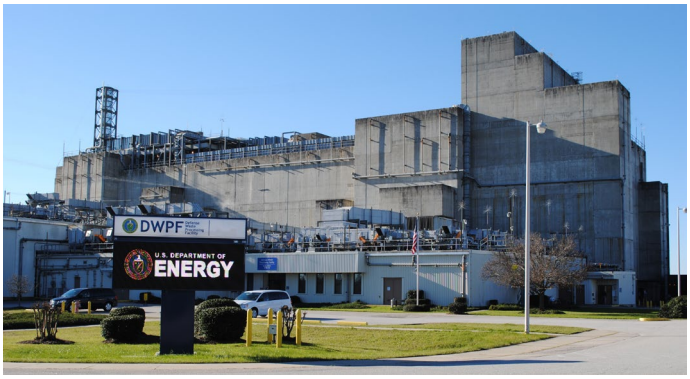
Savannah River Mission Completion (SRMC), EM's liquid waste contractor at SRS, operates DWPF. SRMC is responsible for treating and disposing of the millions of gallons of waste remaining in underground tanks at SRS, as well as closing the tanks.

DWPF uses the process of vitrification to turn the radioactive waste into glass. The highly radioactive waste is combined with frit, a sand-like material, and heated until molten in a 75-ton melter. The molten glass is poured into 10-foot-tall stainless steel canisters where it cools and hardens.

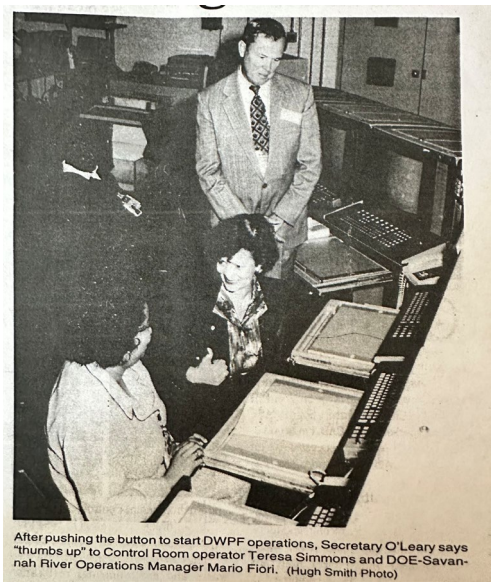
The canisters are then sealed by a remote welding process, and the waste is considered immobilized and safe for long term disposal. The canisters are stored safely in interim storage buildings onsite until a federal repository for high-level waste is established.

Mike Borders, SRMC executive vice president and chief operations officer, said this milestone at DWPF is a testament to the innovative thinking and industrious efforts of SRS teams past and present.

"DWPF's longevity is not just about the impressive three decades of continuous, safe operations, but about the forward-thinking vision of the individuals who designed, built, and now maintain and operate this world-class facility," Borders said. "From the scientists and engineers who developed the groundbreaking vitrification process to the highly skilled operators and engineers who ensure its success every day, every milestone the DWPF has achieved is a testament to their collective ingenuity and determination."



Cutline: *The Defense Waste Processing Facility at the Savannah River Site has been safely pouring high-level waste canisters for 30 years.*


After pushing the button to start DWPF operations, Secretary O'Leary says "thumbs up" to Control Room operator Teresa Simmons and DOE-Savannah River Operations Manager Mario Fiori. (Hugh Smith Photo)

Cutline: *A news clipping from an April 1996 edition of "SRS News" commemorates the startup of the Defense Waste Processing Facility.*