

Recommendation 365  
Plutonium Processing

Background

The Nuclear Materials Program Manager<sup>1</sup> briefed the Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) on the SRS Environmental Management (EM) Plutonium Disposition Strategy at its July 2019 meeting. According to this briefing, EM is responsible for dispositioning six metric tons of surplus plutonium by the downblending of plutonium oxide. Plutonium is highly toxic and plutonium oxide contamination poses a serious risk to human health and the environment including nuclear accidents and radioactive incidents. Furthermore, according to the Program Manager, some of this surplus plutonium is weapons grade.<sup>2</sup>

EM is currently dispositioning its plutonium using one downblending shift per day with the expectation of completing the dispositioning by FY 2046. According to the briefing, the material could be dispositioned more quickly if more funds were allocated for additional downblending shifts and oxidation capabilities. By not processing this material at maximum rate, citizens, SRS employees and contractors, and the environment are being exposed to substantial risk that is avoidable. Furthermore, slower dispositioning could increase costs for surveillance and maintenance related to validating storage life.

Recommendation

The CAB recommends that DOE take the steps necessary to accelerate the dispositioning of the six metric tons of surplus plutonium and to complete the dispositioning process no later than FY 2036.

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<sup>1</sup> Maxcine Maxted

<sup>2</sup> Communication regarding the draft recommendation on August 12, 2019.