Coal Yard Cleanup

Innovative approach aims for shorter schedule, reduced costs in D Area Coal Storage Yard cleanup

This month

COVID-19 response • Site Services projects • H Canyon outages • DHEC ePermitting
Welcome to the June 2020 edition of SRNS Today

Transition and change have been the themes of 2020. We have adjusted to respond to the pandemic, found new ways to conduct business and adapted to new environments, both at work and in our personal lives. But as we move into the Independence Day holiday, I am encouraged by the things that haven’t changed: Savannah River Nuclear Solutions’ commitment to safety and performance excellence; the resilience and talent of our workforce; and the support of our community and stakeholders.

SRNS continued to work through the COVID-19 pandemic in June. We partnered with Augusta University to provide quick coronavirus testing for SRS employees. Additionally, SRNS Site Services completed an impressive amount of work despite dealing with reduced staff, to ensure infrastructure needs are being met.

SRNS has also continued to use innovation and forward thinking to complete our important work. H Canyon recently hired dedicated work control staff to more effectively plan for facility steam outages. SRNS construction recently made progress on removing contaminated soil from the D Area Coal Storage Yard. And SRNS was the first company in South Carolina to submit a request and receive a permit using the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control’s new ePermitting process.

Our company has proven again that we can weather any obstacle and effectively deal with challenges. More changes are surely ahead, but I have no doubt that we are ready and able to handle those, too.

I hope you enjoy this edition of SRNS Today, and as always, thank you for your interest in Savannah River Nuclear Solutions.

SRNS, Augusta University partner to provide SRS employee testing for possible COVID-19

SRNS and Augusta University Health (AU Health) have collaborated to provide prompt testing for SRS employees to detect the possible presence of the coronavirus. The agreement has been in place since May 7 and has proven to be a very effective means for quick results, with dozens of employees already benefiting from this swift response.

"The easily accessible testing allows us to quickly identify or rule out transmission within the workforce. We’ve been very pleased with Augusta University Health," said Brenda Mills, SRNS Director, Site Medical. "It’s reassuring to know that fast and reliable tests for COVID-19 are now available for our workers."

According to Sabrina Elam, SRNS Strategic Services Acquisition Manager, the SRS Medical Department had previously observed that many Site employees exhibiting symptoms indicative of COVID-19 were having to wait for extended periods before receiving test results from their healthcare provider. “Once our Site Medical Department identified the need to accelerate the receipt of test results, they initiated a contract through the SRNS procurement group with Augusta University Health. AU Health responded quickly and effectively to meet our needs. We greatly appreciate their assistance."

As SRNS works to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, AU Health Chief Medical Officer Dr. Phillip Coule considers this partnership as one of the many ways AU Health is helping to keep workers safe.

“We feel we have a responsibility to help our community during these challenging times,” said Coule. “We’re proud to leverage our clinical expertise to SRS so they feel confident in doing their part in protecting their staff and the public from infection."

The agreement calls for employees exhibiting symptoms to travel to one of two drive-up test centers in the greater Augusta area. Upon arrival at a test center, employees will verify their identity and scheduled appointment. Next, an AU Health technician will administer a standard test with results being provided within 72 hours to SRS medical personnel through a secure means. SRS medical personnel will then notify the employee of the results.

“The turnaround time for test results is in line with the contractual agreements, Augusta University Health has established with other local companies," said Mills. "The entire process has been running very smoothly."

Employees who test positive for the virus will be requested to seek treatment at the medical facility of their choice. Elam noted once the need for COVID-19 testing support arose, SRNS Procurement expedited efforts to secure these vital services for the Site. “Working with Augusta University Health representatives, SRNS was able to ensure a successful outcome. We’re in this pandemic for an indefinite period of time and having a subcontract in place for site employees to utilize is significant. It has been an outstanding team effort for all involved,” she added.

The prompt availability of laboratory testing for COVID-19 is just one of several methods within the “defense in depth” controls in place to protect workers at SRS.

SRNS recently entered into a contract with nearby Augusta University Health to provide fast and reliable testing for the COVID-19 virus to benefit SRS employees. Lashia Berry (left), Nurse and AU Health Wellness Coordinator for Population Health, and Stephanie Ward, Nurse, AU Health Adult Care Coordinator for Population Health, administer a test.

Photo courtesy Augusta University Health
SRTE thanks front line workers

The Savannah River Tritium Enterprise (SRTE) leadership team thanks employees who continued to work on site each day to fulfill missions critical to national security during the COVID-19 pandemic. (From left) Michael Collins, Area Operations Manager; J.C. Eppling, Chief Business Officer; Linda Wozniak, Human Resources Manager; Deb Solomon, Environmental Security Safety and Health Manager; Mark Davis, Acting Senior Vice President NNSA Operations and Programs; and Mack Price, Project Owner of the Tritium Finishing Facility Line Item Project.

Perseverance pays off for Site Services during pandemic

SRNS Site Services (SS) employees have taken the restraints and complexity associated with working in a COVID-19 environment in stride, quickly, efficiently and safely adapting to the new normal at SRS. The coronavirus disease and reduced staffing levels at SRS have not diminished the need for infrastructure repairs and surveillance activities of all types involving several companies across SRS. Whether the task is small involving a few employees or large, requiring dozens, SS has provided the expertise, manpower and equipment needed to ensure safe and secure operations within all areas of the Site.

According to Wayne Gleaton, SRNS Director, Site Infrastructure SS personnel exhibited a high degree of dedication, experience and skill as they accomplished several large and often, difficult tasks to date during the Essential Mission Critical phase of the pandemic. “Our folks take a lot of pride in safely doing whatever the job requires, including working evenings and weekends,” said Gleaton. “They understand and take ownership of the systems they maintain.”

As an example, Gleaton noted that a small group of operators are essentially covering the entire Site for fire water, domestic water, service water and other similar services, including responding to any off-shift event such as damage caused by severe weather. “They have worked hard the last two months achieving the successful completion of 12 water-related repairs, nine of them major. A recent water-line leak in H Area impacted the Canyon, the Tank Farm and DWPF requiring a priority repair.”

Gleaton explained that COVID-19 has created the need for reduced staffing, with additional SS workers brought in as needed. “One of our first big jobs since COVID hit involved 147 tasks performed during a two-week A Area off-shift event such as damage caused by severe weather. “They have worked hard the last two months achieving the successful completion of 12 water-related repairs, nine of them major. A recent water-line leak in H Area impacted the Canyon, the Tank Farm and DWPF requiring a priority repair.”

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Projects completed

Other projects safely and cost-effectively completed over the last two months

• Replacement of ultraviolet disinfection system at Central Sanitary Treatment Plant
• Deactivation of the Ford Building in N Area
• Implementation of multiple design safety analysis items in Tritium and the Savannah River National Laboratory
• Major overhaul of a diesel fire water pump in Z Area
• Maintenance for HB Line and H Canyon emergency diesel generators
• Extensive HEPA filter testing

SRNS finds creative solution to former coal yard cleanup

Powering down in D Area

The long metal arm and strong steel teeth of a massive construction excavator recently cleared its first bucket of hardened clay containing countless bits and pieces of coal, the first step towards removing the contaminated soil from 1.2 acres known as the SRS D Area Coal Storage Yard.

Until recently, the yard held huge piles of coal used to continuously feed an enormous powerhouse built in the 1950s. The once-impressive powerhouse is now cold and dark, awaiting demolition.

“Any large pile of coal that sits for nearly six decades will interact with rainwater and the atmosphere,” said Kelsey Holcomb, an SRNS project manager. “Coal contains iron sulfide, also known as pyrite or Fool’s Gold. When it mixes with rainwater, it creates sulfuric acid. The acidity leaches into the soil and draws out heavy metals such as beryllium and chromium.”

According to Holcomb, these heavy metals are found primarily within the first few feet of soil but will slowly migrate over time into the groundwater where they could reach the Savannah River, a source of drinking water for downstream communities.

“We like to catch things as far upstream as possible before we get into a human health or ecology threat condition,” added Holcomb. “We’re taking action to remedy the acidic condition of the soil in the Coal Storage Yard. It currently has about the same pH as Coca-Cola, around 3.0 to 3.2. We’re going to thoroughly mix fine grade limestone throughout the 1.2 acres down to four feet, which will bring the pH back to around 5.5. That’s normal for this area.”

Plans call for using approximately 1,000 tons of fine grade limestone over a period of six months to complete the project. SRNS Construction will work seven days a week at all times to control erosion and ensure no sediment enters nearby creeks and streams as a result of soil excavation.

Piles of unused coal were removed from the Coal Storage Yard in 2012 and the surface scraped to reveal a layer of red clay. “It looks like the surface of Mars out there,” said Holcomb.

The sprawling acreage will change from red to gray over the next six months, as the final covering—normally sodded grass—will now consist of a layer of limestone gravel. This innovative approach is expected to shorten the project schedule by one month and significantly reduce the overall cost.
Improving H Canyon outages
Specialized H Area team focuses on efficiencies and effectiveness

Employees in the SRNS H Canyon facility recently took steps to improve planning for facility steam outages by hiring dedicated work control staff to prepare for outages full time.

“In the past, we have relied on the existing work control team to also plan for outages,” said H Area Maintenance Manager James Rosema. “However, we found that it was nearly impossible to do any advanced preparation for outages, as our work control workers would get overtaken by day-to-day or more urgent work control needs. Having a dedicated work control staff to just focus on preparing for outages has left our team better prepared.”

Steam is used in H Canyon and its associated “Outside Facilities” to provide heat for process operations and making process operation tank transfers. It is also used to provide heat for the control room and offices located in the facility. H Canyon undergoes two steam outages a year to repair steam pressure header systems. Outages generally last about two weeks but can last longer if needed.

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