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SRNS High-Risk Property Training Helps Protect U.S. Strategic Commodities

AIKEN, S.C., – July 11, 2023 – Periodically, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) property management employees publicly release a wide variety of excess materials and equipment. A vital aspect of their day-to-day responsibilities is to ensure none of the items designated for public release could potentially impact our national security, a challenging task.

According to Krystee Ervin, Nuclear Nonproliferation and Export Control Specialist, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, what radically increases the difficulty of this task is that these strategic goods are incredibly common. The majority of them have an everyday industrial purpose yet also play an important role in the development of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

Recently, SRNS employees and other individuals from Department of Energy (DOE) sites across the U.S. underwent 3-1/2 days of intensive training on this topic. The course focused on how to prevent the unintended or illicit transfer of strategic commodities to individuals who may use them in a weapons program. “That’s DOE’s mission when it comes to high-risk property,” said Ervin, who was the team leader for the training.

A few years ago, a U.S. company purchased a large box of miscellaneous equipment at a DOE laboratory’s public sale. The box contained a small, metal component that could be used to enrich uranium. That company later sold the box at a secondary auction to a woman who then sold the high-risk component to China.

“She gets caught by enforcement agents and says, ‘Hey, I got it from that company and they didn’t say anything about it,’” said Ervin. “About a month later, she was caught again committing a similar act. That said, it’s important to note the DOE Lab had provided proper notice to the company that made the original purchase.”

Ervin explained that incidents like this often occur due to a lack of education. “Our team of six from Oak Ridge National Laboratory are here this week to familiarize participants about high-risk commodities and the regulations that control them. We’re not here to make anybody an expert. We want them to know where to go to for assistance,” she said.

The course was designed for DOE and DOE-contractor personnel who are responsible for the life cycle management of proliferation-sensitive property. This includes employees involved in property management, procurement, excess and sales, material management, shipping and receiving, export-control and classification, among others.

The primary objective of the training is to provide a basic understanding of U.S. nonproliferation policy and applicable requirements for handling proliferation-sensitive equipment, materials and technology. The agenda included a detailed review of controlled equipment, including hands-on exercises, interactive modules and exercises.

“We have several SRS employees attending this course to receive certification regarding high-risk, proliferation-sensitive property, which will be beneficial to multiple Site tenants,” said Tammy Rimes, Director, Supply Chain Operations and Programs. “And with our new SRNS missions and the acquisition of even more high-risk property, these newly certified employees will play an increasingly important role. We’re pleased that SRNS was able to host this event for employees from around the DOE Complex.”



(Second from the right) Oak Ridge National Laboratory’s Krystee Ervin explains how items found at Department of Energy sites often appear to be of little or no consequence but may in reality be high-risk to national security. (From left) Cheryl Ludwick, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions; Daniel Henderson, Office of Inspector General; and (far right) Hamilton Jenkins, DOE-Savannah River, participated in this course focused on how to prevent the unintended or illicit transfer of strategic commodities to individuals who may use them in a weapons program. The specialized training was held at EM’s Savannah River Site.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor-led company with Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, is responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site, located near Aiken, South Carolina.