



Savannah River Site Watch

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<https://srswatch.org/>

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While Nation Rallies to Confront Virus, Savannah River Site Takes Eye Off the Threat and Focuses on Planning for New Nuclear Arms Race - Draft EIS on Plutonium Bomb Plant (PBP) at SRS Coming April 3

SRS Watch Continues Demand for Preparation of Overarching “Programmatic” EIS (PEIS) before Preparation of Site-Specific EISs on Plutonium Pit Production, Lawsuit being Pondered by Groups

Columbia, South Carolina – In the midst of the concerted fight against the coronavirus, the U.S. Department of Energy confirms that it has lost sight of that national effort and is instead focusing on planning for nuclear war, including the proposed Plutonium Bomb Plant (PBP) at the Savannah River Site (SRS). DOE’s obsession to build new facilities for plutonium “pit” production for new and refurbished nuclear weapons poses a short-term threat in the face of the virus and a medium-term threat of a new nuclear arms race, according to the public interest group Savannah River Site Watch.

As the spread of the coronavirus was ramping up at a rapid pace, DOE’s National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) revealed on Thursday, March 26 that it had other priorities and is bent on moving forward with a new nuclear arms race and the proposed Plutonium Bomb Plant at SRS. On March 26, NNSA communicated the position that it has irresponsibly wandered from the COVID-19 fight and aims to release a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the Plutonium Bomb Plant on April 3, followed by an “online public hearing” and a 45-day comment period.

The PBP would be located in the partially finished, ill-constructed plutonium fuel (MOX) plant at SRS, at a cost of up to \$5 billion by 2030. The facility would make 50 or more plutonium “pits” - cores of nuclear weapons - per year, with the goal of aiding Los Alamos National Lab in replacing all pits in all 4000 new and refurbished nuclear weapons, with the dangerous goal to keep that stockpile through the end of the century. Additionally, a PBP at SRS would mean yet more plutonium brought into South Carolina, with the risk of it being stranded, and more chemical and nuclear waste at the site, diverting attention for the much-needed site clean-up, according to SRS Watch.

Text of NNSA message on March 26 concerning upcoming release of a draft EIS Plutonium Bomb Plant:

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has approved a draft Savannah River Site (SRS) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the production of plutonium pits at SRS, which evaluates the potential environmental impacts of producing approximately 50 pits a year with surge capacity for 80 pits a year if needed. This EIS is specific to SRS and

was announced in the Notice of Intent for the SRS EIS that was published in the Federal Register (FR) on June 10, 2019.

The draft SRS EIS will be announced with a Notice of Availability (NOA) in the FR on April 3, 2020. The draft SRS EIS will be posted on the NNSA National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Reading Room website on the same day.

The draft EIS will be released for public comment for approximately 45 days starting on April 3, 2020. During the comment period, NNSA will accept comments from all interested agencies (Federal, State, and local), public interest groups, Native American Tribes, businesses, and members of the public. NNSA plans to hold a virtual online public hearing on the draft SRS EIS in light of public health concerns. The hearing is tentatively scheduled for April 30, however, the final details will be published on the NNSA NEPA Reading Room website as stated in the NOA.

Following the comment period, and after consideration of comments received, NNSA will prepare a final EIS for the production of plutonium pits at SRS. NNSA will publish the final EIS on the NNSA NEPA Reading Room website.

DOE/NNSA is committed to meeting its obligations under NEPA as it carries out its obligation to establish the capability to produce 80 pits per year beginning no later than during 2030. This commitment involves evaluating the NEPA implications of the pit production mission in this site-specific SRS EIS. It also involves NNSA preparing an additional site-specific LANL Site-Wide EIS Supplement Analysis (SA) NEPA review, and a completed complex-wide analysis in the final SA for the Complex Transformation Supplemental Programmatic EIS.

“NNSA efforts wasting taxpayer resources on nuclear war planning and the SRS Plutonium Bomb Plant is misguided in the face of the threat the COVID-19 poses to all of us,” said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. “Pursuit of a costly new Plutonium Bomb Plant at SRS once again demonstrates the inability of SRS and DOE to provide leadership in the face of the looming virus threat,” added Clements. See exchange between Clements and SRS in “notes,” on SRS foot-dragging with its virus response.

SRS Watch and Nuclear Watch New Mexico and Tri-Valley CAREs, sister groups in the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability (ANA), have long maintained that before the EIS was prepared that a “programmatic” environmental-review document was required under law to assess all pit-production and support activities across the DOE complex. DOE has refused to prepared that “Programmatic EIS” (PEIS), setting up the possibility of a lawsuit brought by the three groups under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), according to Clements.

Notes:

NNSA notice in Federal Register, June 10, 2019, on preparation of draft EIS on Plutonium Bomb Plant - a meeting was held in N. Augusta, SC on June 27, 2019 and critics of the proposal outnumbered the contractors and politicians backing the scheme, apparently for economic reasons:

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-06-10/pdf/2019-12003.pdf>

SRS Watch appeal and communication to SRS to move to “essential” operations, which the site did only reluctantly, showing a total lack of leadership in the face of the current crisis. March 2020:
<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Savannah-River-Operations-Office-on-COVID-19-March-23-2020-and-earlier.pdf>

SRS Watch and other groups outline need for Programmatic EIS (PEIS) on plutonium pit production, before site-specific documents are prepared, news release, January 9, 2020: “Pursuit of New Plutonium Pit Production at SRS Plutonium Bomb Plant (PBP) and Los Alamos Violates Environmental Law”:
<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Pit-production-SA-group-news-release-Jan-9-2020.pdf>

Funding and narrative about plutonium pit production in DOE’s Fiscal Year 2021 budget request to Congress, Volume 1 (NNSA), Feb. 10, 2020:
https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2020/03/f72/doe-fy2021-budget-volume-1_2.pdf