



Savannah River Site Watch

**FOLLOW THIS COMMUNICATION CHAIN BETWEEN SRS WATCH & SRS TO SEE  
HOW SRS RESISTED MOVING TO “MISSION-CRITICAL ACTIVITIES,” WHICH  
SRS WATCH HAS BEEN PUSHING FOR**

**SAVANNAH RIVER OPERATIONS OFFICE  
AIKEN, SC 29802  
MARCH 23, 2020**

**CONTACT:**

Amy Boyette, Director  
Office of External Affairs  
803-952-6120

[Amy.Boyette@srs.gov](mailto:Amy.Boyette@srs.gov)

The safety and health of the SRS workforce --- federal and contractor employees --- is the top priority of SRS leadership. This morning, SRS leadership was notified of its first positive COVID-19 test. As a result and in prudent response to the current situation regarding COVID-19 in the Central Savannah River Area, the Savannah River Site will be transitioning over the next few days to focus on minimum mission-critical activities, to include the maximum use of teleworking. SRS is choosing to take this action out of an abundance of caution.

During this period, activities that support our missions will be limited to those necessary to ensure the safety of the public, our workers, the environment, and critical national security missions. In conjunction with our colleagues across the Department of Energy complex, SRS continues to closely monitor developments associated with the coronavirus. SRS will continue to provide updates as circumstances develop.

The transition to minimum mission-critical activities is being specifically tailored to each facility at SRS and must be conducted in an efficient and safe manner. Affected contractor employees will receive additional guidance from their employers.

Employees are reminded to call 5-SITE or go to the [SRS.GOV](http://SRS.GOV) website and click on the SRS Status & Emergency Information button for updates.

**From:** 'Tom Clements' via Bananas <nuclearbananas@googlegroups.com>

**To:** nuclear

**Subject:** SRS response to my message about the virus Fwd: [EXTERNAL] Something similar to SRS? "Coronavirus: 1,000 Sellafield staff self-isolating amid pandemic" : Does SRS think the COVID-19 threat is serious or not? When will more aggressive steps be taken?

**Date:** Mon, Mar 23, 2020 10:03 am

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In response to my email below, about preparedness for COVID-19 by DOE at the Savannah River Site, SRS was forced to respond on Saturday, March 21 with an email to me, also sent out as a news release. So far, all they are doing is monitoring the situation and taking only initial steps. SRS is operating pretty much as usual and looks like they are trying to avoid going to "essential" operations only. It remains my position that "non-essential" operations, like unjustified planning for nuclear war, should cease. At least SRS is not now claiming there are no positive COVID-19 cases at SRS, something they wouldn't know as there has not been uniform testing of the site's 11,000 workers but which they claimed in a news release of last week..

If anyone sees a response by other DOE sites or DOE in general, please pass that on.

Meanwhile, while a huge amount of US workers are by choice or forced to be at home, DOE continues with a large amount of worker movement to and from and around the sites. Life has changed all around us and impacted all of us and those we know but SRS proudly and amazingly claims the site is "fully operational."

Thanks,  
Tom,

-----Original Message-----

From: DOE-SROEA@srs.gov <DOE-SROEA@srs.gov>

To: Tom Clements <tomclements329@cs.com>; amy.boyyette@srs.gov <amy.boyyette@srs.gov>

Cc: Thomas.Johnson@srs.gov <Thomas.Johnson@srs.gov>; Christian.Harris@srnl.doe.gov <Christian.Harris@srnl.doe.gov>; barbara.smoak@srs.gov <barbara.smoak@srs.gov>;

dean.campbell@srs.gov <dean.campbell@srs.gov>; Michael.Budney@srs.gov

<Michael.Budney@srs.gov>; david.borak@em.doe.gov <david.borak@em.doe.gov>

Sent: Sat, Mar 21, 2020 6:56 pm

Subject: RE: [EXTERNAL] Something similar to SRS? "Coronavirus: 1,000 Sellafield staff self-isolating amid pandemic" : Does SRS think the COVID-19 threat is serious or not? When will more aggressive steps be taken?

Mr. Clements:

Savannah River Site (SRS) leadership is working daily to assess the evolving COVID-19 situation and ensure the actions we take are consistent with guidance and direction received from the President, the Department of Energy, State of South Carolina and the CDC.

SRS is implementing its Infectious Disease Plan which prescribes the actions to be taken depending on the severity of the outbreak. We have implemented actions for the current situation and have made preparations to enable efficient implementation of higher level actions should they be required. Again, we are ensuring we stay aligned

with national, state and local government direction. Should we change the level of response we will keep everyone informed.

We have moved to expand telework for all eligible federal and contractor employees to encourage social distancing. Employees will be hearing more from their managers as telework plans continue to be finalized and rolled out.

We are also working through the contractual process of providing paid leave for those employees who are unable to work due to COVID-19 related circumstances but cannot or are not eligible to telework.

There are critical activities at SRS that must continue to ensure appropriate levels of safety and security, and to enable important risk reduction activities to continue for the long-term protection of the public and the environment. We will be prudent in protecting our workforce while still meeting these obligations.

Regards,  
Amy

Amy R. Boyette, Director  
Office of External Affairs  
US Department of Energy  
Savannah River Operations Office  
[803-952-6120](tel:803-952-6120) office / [803-761-3897](tel:803-761-3897) mobile

**From:** Tom Clements <tomclements329@cs.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, March 20, 2020 2:08 PM  
**To:** BOYETTE, AMY R <amy.boyette@srs.gov>; DOESROEA <DOE-SROEA@srs.gov>  
**Cc:** JOHNSON, THOMAS JR <Thomas.Johnson@srs.gov>; Christian Harris <Christian.Harris@srnl.doe.gov>; Barbara Smoak <barbara.smoak@srs.gov>; Dean Campbell <dean.campbell@srs.gov>; BUDNEY, MICHAEL D <Michael.Budney@srs.gov>; David A Borak <david.borak@em.doe.gov>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Something similar to SRS? "Coronavirus: 1,000 Sellafeld staff self-isolating amid pandemic" : Does SRS think the COVID-19 threat is serious or not? When will more aggressive steps be taken?

By failing to halt "non-essential" operations and by scientific inability to honestly say that no SRS staff are infected with the COVID-19 virus (due to lack of testing), is SRS setting itself up for something like what's happening at Sellafeld (or worse)? Is the intransigence of SRS to take more aggressive action (that many of the rest of us are following) putting more staff and/or the public at risk?

### **"Coronavirus: 1,000 Sellafeld staff self-isolating amid pandemic"**

BBC, 18 March 2020

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cumbria-51951984>

About 1,000 employees at the Sellafield nuclear site in Cumbria are self-isolating amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The firm earlier said it was carrying out a controlled shutdown of the Magnox plant, ahead of any absences.

The plant in Seascale reprocesses spent fuel and Sellafield Ltd said it was scaling back operations so staff could concentrate on critical processes.

The thousand staff represents about 8% of the whole workforce.

They are either showing symptoms, have close family who have symptoms, or are having to distance themselves because they have an underlying health condition.

On closing the reprocessing site, Sellafield said: "As a proactive measure, to retain the reprocessing stream in a sustainable state for the future, we are moving to a controlled shutdown of the Magnox reprocessing plant over the next few days.

"This approach will enable the best opportunity for an effective restart when circumstances permit. With safety in mind, similar measures may be necessary elsewhere across the business."

-----Original Message-----

From: Tom Clements <[tomclements329@cs.com](mailto:tomclements329@cs.com)>

To: amy.boyette <[amy.boyette@srs.gov](mailto:amy.boyette@srs.gov)>; DOE-SROEA <[DOE-SROEA@srs.gov](mailto:DOE-SROEA@srs.gov)>

Cc: thomas.johnson <[thomas.johnson@srs.gov](mailto:thomas.johnson@srs.gov)>; christian.harris <[christian.harris@srnl.doe.gov](mailto:christian.harris@srnl.doe.gov)>; barbara.smoak <[barbara.smoak@srs.gov](mailto:barbara.smoak@srs.gov)>; dean.campbell <[dean.campbell@srs.gov](mailto:dean.campbell@srs.gov)>; michael.budney <[michael.budney@srs.gov](mailto:michael.budney@srs.gov)>; David.Borak <[David.Borak@em.doe.gov](mailto:David.Borak@em.doe.gov)>

Sent: Fri, Mar 20, 2020 11:35 am

Subject: Does SRS think the COVID-19 threat is serious or not? When will more aggressive steps be taken?

Hello Ms. Boyette,

During the government shutdowns of past years, DOE and SRS declared certain jobs as "essential" and "non-essential" and those workers critical to essential operations were kept at work. Non-essential workers were sent home. Obviously such things as high-level nuclear waste management and security of plutonium at SRS fall into the essential category.

While SRS has taken a few initial steps concerning worker safety, when will some form of emergency be declared or order issued such that only essential workers be allowed to report to the site? Is such a step even being considered?

The "[SRS Status and Emergency Information](#)" web page has only a single notice - updated on March 19, 2020 - about minimal steps being taken to protect workers. The "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for SRS Visitors and Employees", amazingly, states that "The Savannah River Site is fully operational." The page makes the claim that I don't think can be backed up as not everyone has been tested: "Currently, SRS has no cases of COVID-19." Of note, the "guidance" makes this claim: "Some employees are teleworking, and we are expanding this capability to the extent possible, but the important missions of SRS must continue and for much of our work, telework is simply not a viable option." No case is made about what the "important missions" are that require on-site work or why non-essential work, which SRS may happen to deem as "important," is continuing.

Additionally, it is noted that the mentioned web page states as of 11:35 a.m. of Friday, March 20, 2020 that "There are no operational emergencies or scheduled delays at this time." But there is no information about the status of issuance of any type of order or additional steps being taken to further address the COVID-19 situation.

It is clear that DOE is aware that halting non-essential public meetings is prudent in the face of the COVID-19 situation. On March 16, the SRS Citizens Advisory Board sent out an email that said: "SRS CAB Meetings along with all other EM SSAB meetings are **postponed**. Please see the below statement from DOE Headquarters: *As the United States responds to COVID-19, many of you have expressed concern about traveling to and participating in upcoming Site-Specific Advisory Board (SSAB) meetings. This includes the SRS Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) meetings scheduled for March 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. In response to those concerns, and out of an abundance of caution, the DOE Office of Environmental Management is postponing all SSAB meetings through the end of April.*"

It is understandable why the non-essential SRS CAB meeting was postponed. Following the concern expressed in the SRS CAB message, is SRS exercising a similar "abundance of caution" in continuing with SRS as "fully operational" and thus continuing to "fully" conduct non-essential operations?

Even the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission has slowly begun discussions about how to respond to the virus concerning operation of critical nuclear facilities. A teleconference that will be held on March 20 - [Meeting with Nuclear Industry to discuss COVID-19 Regulatory Impacts](#) - will begin a dialogue with stakeholders about how to respond to the virus in case nuclear facilities are impacted. Though only a first tentative step, at least the NRC has begun this dialogue and the public could only hope that DOE would likewise engage the public in a similar manner, something that is unfortunately a chronic weak point of how DOE conducts its business.

Until SRS takes the threat of the virus with the seriousness that the CDC and other federal agencies have determined it merits, it's starting to look like SRS management thinks the virus is not such a serious threat and its impact to workers poses minimal subsequent risk to the wider community. The wider public in South Carolina is to a large degree staying at home in order to protect the greater good of the state but it does not appear that SRS, with around 11,000 workers, has fully yet joined in our group effort.

The letter to the editor below - "Is SRS at high virus risk?" - encapsulates some of the concerns with keeping most contract workers at the site. The points raised in it need to be addressed publicly by SRS.

I will be attentive to action that the site must take to protect worker and public healthy and safety and hope such action takes place as soon as possible. I request to be informed about what the site will do to protect the South Carolina and Georgia community to the highest degree possible. We are all in this together and most are doing our share to protect our ourselves and our fellow citizens. Is SRS doing its share?

Given the urgency of the situation at hand, I request a response to this message.

Sincerely,  
Tom Clements  
SRS Watch  
Columbia, SC  
[tomclements329@cs.com](mailto:tomclements329@cs.com)

Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle, March 19, 2020

<https://www.augustachronicle.com/opinion/20200319/letter-is-srs-at-high-virus-risk>

## Letter: Is SRS at high virus risk?

It's my understanding that Savannah River Site employees are not able to work from home because it's not allowed in their contracts with the U.S. Department of Energy. Meanwhile, DOE employees are allowed to work from home.

They are not taking this seriously and acting quickly to make that change so nonessential personnel can work from home. They are doing token stuff such as adding hand sanitizer stations and increasing cleaning crews (who, by the way, do not get sick pay if they don't come in, so some of them could be sick and spreading the coronavirus around as they "clean").

There are operators working in close quarters and many engineers in cubicles. The cubicle working environment is similar to being in a large airplane - all the air in the room is shared and sometimes four desks back up to the same cubicle wall. Some of the cubicles have two or three people sharing them, and they can get a maximum of about 3 feet away from one another. So many, many people are in the same room, sharing the same breathing air for nine hours a day, for days on end. It's like flying in a plane but with the people just a little more spread-out, all breathing the same air.

This is putting the site mission at risk by increasing the odds that many of the personnel will get very sick. This is massively irresponsible. It's putting our communities at risk by exposing all these people unnecessarily, and if there's anything we should be learning, it's that country after country has shown us that the only way to slow the spread is by isolating. And by not doing that we are creating a situation where we will overwhelm our hospitals and increase infection rates and deaths.

A new DOE order will allow some paid work from home, but it only applies to a few people with pre-existing medical conditions. It will do nothing to relieve the crowding in the cubicles.

This is Increasing the risk for everyone in our community and the mission of the site.

Kathy Glenn  
Aiken, S.C.