



Savannah River Site Watch

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Columbia, SC

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<https://srswatch.org/>

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Numerous Comments Submitted on NNSA's Draft EIS on the SRS Plutonium Bomb Plant; Question Need for Expanding Plutonium "Pit" Production to SRS, Call for Programmatic EIS to Review Pit Need

In Bizarre and Dangerous Twist, Terminated Non-Proliferation Facility (MOX) is Proposed to become Center for U.S. Proliferation, Replacing Pits in New Nuclear Weapons and the Entire Nuclear Stockpile

Columbia, SC – Numerous public interest groups and individuals have submitted critical comments on the U.S. Department of Energy's unjustified proposal to expand production of plutonium "pits" - the core of nuclear weapons - to DOE's Savannah River Site near Aiken, South Carolina. A flurry of comments were submitted as the comment period ended on June 2.

Comments were formally submitted on the National Nuclear Security Administration's *Draft Environmental Impact Statement on Plutonium Pit Production at Savannah River Site; Aiken, South Carolina*, which was released on April 3. Various groups submitted their own hard-hitting comments and solicited comments to be submitted by their supporters.

Commenters uniformly opposed plans to expand plutonium pit production into the terminated plutonium fuel (MOX) building at SRS, to produce 50 or more pits by 2030, called for preparation of an overarching Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to review the need for pit-production expansion and impacts at a host of DOE sites. They also challenged the need for new pits for new nuclear weapons and for pit replacement in all active and reserve U.S. warheads. Additionally, groups questioned disposal of pit transuranic (plutonium) waste in the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico.

Questions were raised about the intent of pit-production expansion at both SRS and Los Alamos National Lab, which appears to be to hold on to a massive nuclear stockpile of about 4000 nuclear weapons, in violation of disarmament obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Commenters questioned why NNSA is not reviewing reuse of pits, of which there are over 15,000 in storage at DOE's Pantex site in Texas and why NNSA has been dragging its feet on congressionally required plutonium-aging studies. According to a 2007 report by the JASON group of experts, "Most primary types have credible minimum lifetimes in excess of 100 years as regards aging of plutonium."

“It is heartening to see the volume of comments calling into question the claimed but unjustified need to expand nuclear weapons production to the Savannah River Site, not for deterrence but rather in order to keep the U.S. on the dangerous footing of fighting a large-scale nuclear war,” said Tom, Clements, director of the public-interest organization Savannah River Site Watch. “It is a bizarre and dangerous twist that NNSA has proposed to convert the failed MOX facility at SRS, once endlessly touted as pinnacle of nuclear non-proliferation, into a factory for proliferation and to stimulate a new nuclear arms race,” added Clements

Several groups are known to have solicited comments from their supports, including the South Carolina Chapter of the Sierra Club, Tri-Valley CAREs (Livermore, CA), Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance (Tennessee) and the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Groups submitting detailed comments include Savannah River Site Watch, Nuclear Watch New Mexico, Tri-valley CAREs, Southwest Research and Information Center (Albuquerque, NM), Sierra Club and the League of Women Voters of South Carolina. A group comment was signed by over 40 non-governmental organizations, including several arms control organizations, and, notably, by Dr. Frank von Hippel, highly regarded nuclear non-proliferation expert and professor emeritus at Princeton University.

“While SRS boosters have touted the SRS Plutonium Bomb Plant as filling the funding void created by the termination of the MOX debacle, public interest comments were centered on the lack of need for expanded pit production from a national security and environmental-impact perspective,” said Clements. “Especially in the face of an escalating federal deficit and reorientation of national security due to the coronavirus, we will continue to vigorously challenge the funding and authorization for the expansion of pit production by Congress,” added Clements.

Comments noted that pit fabrication at SRS could lead to yet more plutonium being stranded in South Carolina and production at the site of more transuranic waste and chemical waste and of low-level nuclear waste that could be dumped in unlined trenches at the site. “South Carolinians are tired of being a nuclear waste dumping ground and for that reason alone the pit-production project must be rejected,” said Clements of SRS Watch.

“Conversion of the MOX plant into a bomb factory is now estimated to cost up to \$5 billion by 2030 but as NNSA is rushing the project without proper preparation it is expected that it will be a repeat of the MOX debacle, with massive cost overruns, lengthy schedule delays, chronic mismanagement and ultimate failure,” said Clements.

Savannah River Site Watch, Nuclear Watch New Mexico and Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment, all members of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability (ANA), are pondering a lawsuit on the pit proposal for violating the National Environmental Policy Act. (See comments for details.)

To underscore the importance of the pit issues, the magazine *Arms Control Today* for June 2020, released on to comment deadline of June 2, featured a front-page article entitled *Reconsidering U.S. Plutonium Pit Production Plans*. The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists is also expected to soon have an article on the controversial pit-production issue.

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Notes:

Links to comments and draft EIS:

SRS Watch:

<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Comments-draft-EIS-Plutonium-Bomb-Plant-by-Clements-June-1-2020.pdf>

Nuclear Watch New Mexico: <https://nukewatch.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/nwnm-srs-deis-comments.pdf>

Southwest Research and Information Center:

<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SRIC-SRS-DEIS-comments-060220-plus-attachments-June-2-2020.pdf>

Sierra Club:

<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Sierra-Club-on-pit-draft-EIS-May-29-2020.pdf>

League of Women Voters of South Carolina:

<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/LWV-draft-EIS-comment-May-25-2020-Pits-EIS-for-DOE.pdf>

Group comments by over 40 groups:

<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NGO-group-comment-Draft-SRS-Pit-Production-EIS-June-2-2020.pdf>

Comment of Dr. Frank von Hippel, noted non-proliferation expert, Senior Research Physicist and Professor of Public and International Affairs emeritus, Program on Science and Global Security Princeton University:

<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FvH-Comment-on-draft-DOE-EIS-0541-for-proposed-SRS-pit-production-facility-19May2020.pdf>

Draft EIS on Proposed SRS Plutonium Bomb Plant (SRS PBP) is posted here on NNSA's website:

<https://www.energy.gov/nepa/downloads/doeis-0541-draft-environmental-impact-statement>

Federal Register notice, April 3, 2020 *Notice of Availability of Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Plutonium Pit Production at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina and Announcement of Public Hearing:* <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-04-03/pdf/2020-06557.pdf>