



Savannah River Site Watch

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<https://srswatch.org/>

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**U.S. Department of Energy Confirms 11.5 Metric Tons of Plutonium Stored at Savannah River Site;
SRS Watch Supports DOE Assertion that Plutonium Storage “Not Posing any Additional Risk to
Communities Surrounding the SRS”**

**An Additional 35 MT of Plutonium could come to SRS for Processing as Waste and for Plutonium Pit
Production for Nuclear Weapons Yet Politicians in South Carolina Remain Silent about associated Risks**

Columbia, SC – The U.S. Department of Energy has released a document that confirms that 11.5 metric tons (MT) of plutonium are stored at the Savannah River Site in South Carolina. DOE has stated in [a letter from February 2020](#) that the plutonium is being stored in the old K-Reactor “in a safe manner” and that “this material is not posing any additional risks to communities surrounding the SRS.”

A 1-page SRS fact sheet, [2020 Savannah River Site Plutonium Inventory Update](#), was obtained on September 22, 2020 via a Freedom of information Act request by the public interest group Savannah River Site Watch. It states: “The inventory of surplus plutonium managed by the K-Area Materials Storage (KAMS) facility at the Savannah River Site (SRS) was approximately 11.5 metric tons (MT) at the end of FY 2019.” 9.5 MT of this amount was covered in a recent \$600-million “settlement agreement” between DOE and the State of South Carolina.

“SRS Watch concurs with the DOE position that the plutonium is now being stored safely and challenges those who claim otherwise to immediately present evidence of off-site risks from the stored plutonium,” said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. “Due to on-going processing of nuclear materials, including plutonium, and a massive volume of nuclear waste at the site, SRS clearly does pose a host of risks,” said Clements. “Those that claim imaginary risks of plutonium storage appear to be silent on the real long-term risks of nuclear processing and radioactive waste disposal activities at SRS,” added Clements. “Anyone trying to justify settlement agreement funds for the area around SRS, which is already blessed with financial benefits from the presence of the site, will likely fail in their assertions of threats to the surrounding area from current plutonium storage,” said Clements.

The “SRS plutonium inventory” document confirms that 1 metric ton of plutonium was removed from the SRS inventory. Likewise, the document confirms that 9.5 metric tons of plutonium were imported to

SRS - mostly from the contaminated, closed Rocky Flats pit-production site in CO and the Hanford site in WA - and were added to the 2 MT that were already at the site: “In FY 2019, the Department of Energy (DOE) completed removal of 1 MT of plutonium by transferring this material to other DOE facilities. As a result, approximately 9.5 MT of surplus plutonium inventory, that is subject to the terms of the MOX law, remained in KAMS at the end of FY 2019.” (KAMS = K-Area Material Storage facility)

While it is essential to know how much plutonium is now at SRS, DOE refuses to reveal how much more plutonium it plans to import to SRS and thus has not presented a time-line for plutonium import, plutonium processing, plutonium waste generation and plutonium export. “Politicians in Aiken and in South Carolina have been irresponsibly silent about the risks involved with importing and processing 35 metric tons more weapon-grade plutonium at SRS,” said Clements.

“As DOE plans to dispose of 34 metric tons of plutonium as waste, approximately 27 more tons of plutonium would be brought into the state for downblending. Likewise, as DOE is pursuing an unjustified Plutonium Bomb Plant at SRS to make pits for nuclear weapons, that facility would require about 7.5 metric tons of plutonium to make about 2500 pits. Though it’s a startling amount, it appears DOE has plans to bring an additional 35 metric tons of plutonium into South Carolina, some of which could end up being stranded here as we saw with the failed MOX project,” said Clements. “It is imperative that DOE immediately present a timetable for plutonium shipments to SRS and shipments out of the site and reveal where all this plutonium would be purified prior to processing at SRS,” added Clements. “Politicians are silent about the plutonium-import plans and the real risks of SRS yet are loudly clamoring for a large cut of the \$600-million settlement agreement pie, which reveals the real impetus is financial and not addressing the real risks posed by SRS,” added Clements

The just-released document also implies that unirradiated fuel from the long-closed Fast Flux Test Facility at Hanford could be directly disposed of as transuranic waste in the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), via chopping up the fuel rods to remove the MOX fuel pellets for repackaging into WIPP disposal containers: “The KAMS inventory also includes approximately 0.7 MT of unirradiated mixed oxide fuel which contains fuel-grade plutonium and is stored in Type B shipping casks. The Department is evaluating alternative approaches for processing of this fuel-grade plutonium material which significantly reduces handling time and the associated worker radiation dose for removal from SC and final disposition.”

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Notes:

2020 Savannah River Site Plutonium Inventory Update, obtained by SRS Watch via FOIA request, September 22, 2020, confirms 11.5 MT of plutonium are stored in old K-Reactor at SRS:

<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/plutonium-inventory-SRS-2020-FOIA-rcvd-Sep-22-2020.pdf>

DOE letter to SRS Citizens Advisory Board, February 12, 2020 on plutonium storage: “...not posing any additional risk to the communities surrounding the SRS.” https://www.srs.gov/general/outreach/srs-cab/library/responses/DOE_Response_to_CAB_Rec_365.pdf

SRS Watch memo to SRS Citizens Advisory Board on risks of more coming plutonium to SRS and need for monitoring, September 22, 2020: <https://srswatch.org/plutonium-alert-at-srs-srs-set-to-receive-35-metric-tons-of-plutonium-for-processing-srs-citizens-advisory-board-requested-to-closely-monitor-risky-plutonium-projects/>

August 28, 2020, Federal Register notice on “Record of Decision” to dispose of an additional 7.1 MT of plutonium as waste: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-08-28/pdf/2020-19023.pdf>

December 24, 2015, NNSA notice in the Federal Register concerning disposal of 6 MT of SRS plutonium in WIPP: Preferred Alternative for Certain Quantities of Plutonium Evaluated in the *Final Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement*.
<https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2015/12/24/2015-32440/preferred-alternative-for-certain-quantities-of-plutonium-evaluated-in-the-final-surplus-plutonium>

Letter to DOE by SRS Watch, August 11, 2020 calling on a Programmatic EIS on the overall plutonium disposition program, which remains in some chaos – there has been NO response to the letter:
<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Letter-SRS-Watch-to-DOE-on-need-for-PEIS-on-plutonium-disposition-August-11-2020.pdf>

SRS Watch news “EIS on SRS Plutonium Bomb Plant totally Inadequate; “Pit” Production for Unneeded Nuclear Warheads mean more Plutonium and Nuclear Waste in South Carolina,” September 25, 2020: <https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/SRS-Watch-news-on-EIS-on-PBP-Sept-25-2020.pdf>

Until a few years ago, SRS would publicly state the amount of plutonium stored at SRS – for example, see this presentation to the SRS Citizens Advisory Board, which revealed 12.8 MT at the site in 2009: *Surplus, Non-Pit Plutonium Consolidation at the Savannah River Site*, April 28, 2009:
https://cab.srs.gov/library/meetings/2009/nm/nm_20090428_surplus_pu_consolidation.pdf