



Savannah River Site Watch

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Nuclear News Update

November 9, 2020

News release posted here: <https://srswatch.org/srs-irresponsibly-silent-on-high-level-waste-facility-hot-commissioning-but-rumor-of-problem-confirmed-by-doe-oversight-board-dnfsb/>

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Safety Board Confirms Rumors about Problems with Start Up of Salt Waste Processing Facility at Savannah River Site; DOE-SRS Refuses to Provide an Update on Status of the Facility – Why?

Columbia, SC – Despite silence by the Department of Energy on the urgent matter, the Defense Waste Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) has confirmed rumors that there were start-up problems with the large facility to process high-level nuclear waste at the DOE’s Savannah River Site.

The public interest group Savannah River Site Watch (SRS Watch) heard an unconfirmed rumor over a week ago that there were problems with pumps, valves, one storage tank and at least one process line during initial operations of the Salt Waste Processing Facility (SWPF) and that the processing of waste thus faced operational problems. Despite several requests by SRS Watch for a comment about the status of SWPF, DOE-SRS has refused to provide any update on the status of the facility.

DOE issued a [news release on October 6, 2020](#) that it was starting “hot commissioning” of the SWPF, with radioactive materials being pumped into it. In the news release, DOE stated “The first batch of 4,000 gallons of waste will take about 10 days to process as the facility methodically goes through a series of surveillances and sampling to ensure all aspects of the process work as designed.” Yet, despite the importance of the issue, nothing has been said by DOE since that time about how the processing of the waste and operation of the facility has gone.

In an [October 16, 2020 weekly report](#), posted on November 9, the DNFSB confirmed a problem with one pump though more pumps and at least one process line could face problems: “The second major step, which is to remove cesium-137 by caustic side-solvent extraction (CSSX), has yet to be performed due to mechanical issues with pump P-109-A, which pumps from the salt solution feed tank to the solvent extraction contactor bank. Examination of the pump once it was removed identified the need to conduct a rebuild of the pump internals. Maintenance is ongoing.” It is unknown how serious the pump rebuild is or if there are other start-up issues.

“Given that the successful operation of SWPF is essential to managing high-level nuclear waste at SRS and emptying the waste tanks, it is imperative that DOE now provide an update as to the status of the facility,” said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. “DOE must provide updates to the public on a regular basis to instill confidence that the operation is proceeding as planned, but the current silence on the matter undermines public confidence,” added Clements. “We must be informed if the current problem is simply a mechanical problem that can be quickly solved or if this is a matter that will slow or stop SWPF start-up operations for a lengthy period of time,” said Clements.

SRS Watch first requested an update on SWPF on October 28. (That email is available on request). In DOE’s refusal to provide an update to SRS Watch about the status of SWPF, all they would do was point to a brief and totally uninformative comment to the SRS Citizens Advisory Board on October 26: “DOE-SR Deputy Manager, Thomas Johnson addressed the SRS CAB on Monday and provided the current status of SWPF. You can view his remarks on the SRSCAB YouTube channel at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=8BYMeCVIEWM>. His remarks start a little before the 26:00 minute mark.”

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