



Savannah River Site Watch

### **Status of Savannah River Site (SRS) - Jülicher Entsorgungsgesellschaft für Nuklearanlagen mbH (JEN) cooperation on processing of AVR spent fuel**

The recent agreement between the CDU and Green parties, new partners in the government of the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), to pursue an on-site storage facility at Jülich for AVR spent fuel has likely been overlooked by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). Likewise, the comment by the Beate Kallenbach-Herbert, director of JEN, that "We will propose to abandon the option of exporting the castors to the U.S." has also likely been ignored by DOE officials.

DOE should pay attention as the new developments will significantly impact the scheme that some Savannah River Site (SRS) officials and contractors have pursued: import of 300,000 irradiated graphite balls from the long-closed gas-cooled AVR reactor. If they are not yet aware of the changed circumstances they soon will be.

A proposal has been on the table for 10 years to export the AVR graphite spent fuel from the Jülich research center to the DOE's Savannah River Site in South Carolina. For that entire time the proposal has been opposed by the public. On 26 September 2017, the SRS Citizens Advisory Board, an official government panel that advises DOE on environmental issues at SRS, [passed a recommendation entitled](#) "Oppose Receipt of German SNF for Treatment and Storage in the U.S."

In its [21 December 2107 response](#), the DOE manager of SRS did not accept the CAB recommendation.

On 20 February 2019, NGO Savannah River Site Watch (SRS Watch), which has opposed the import of the German spent fuel since the inception of the proposal, [sent a letter to DOE](#) asking that the cooperation between JEN and SRS be terminated. DOE did not bother to respond to the request. SRS Watch had appealed to DOE many times, both orally and in written comments in response to the inadequate [environmental document on the import proposal](#), for the project to be terminated. DOE always ignored such appeals and has now become silent about the matter.

Currently, [modification number 9 of the SRS-JEN contract](#), called a "Work for Others Agreement, runs through 28 February 2023. The agreement, obtained by SRS Watch via a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, involves research & development by SRS to process the imported irradiated graphite balls, to remove uranium, with resulting nuclear waste dumped at SRS or other sites in the US.

As part of this R&D, SRS has intended to import a small number of [irradiated graphite balls](#) and [33 unirradiated graphite balls](#). The SRS documents from 2019 were obtained by SRS Watch via a FOIA request. It is unknown if any of the graphite balls were imported to SRS as the project is surrounded in secrecy. But it is believed that no imports have taken place.

The SRS CAB will meet near SRS on 25-26 July 2022. (See [agenda here](#).) During a public comment period at the CAB meeting, SRS Watch will give a full update about the situation in Germany and, once again, issue an appeal for the JEN-SRS cooperation to be terminated. DOE must formally communicate that the cooperation will end and the scheme to dump the AVR spent fuel at SRS will likewise be abandoned. In any event, no new agreement must be considered after February 2023.

As DOE and SRS have been silent on the AVR spent fuel issue for several years, it is expected they will not raise the issue on their own and that they will not respond to new information. Thus, DOE will continue with its failed strategy to try and keep the public and the CAB in the dark.

But time has run out on DOE's stonewalling strategy. All aspects the JEN-SRS cooperation related to spent fuel processing or import must end once and for all. If DOE wants to work with JEN on the AVR spent fuel management in Germany, then the public must be fully informed about that cooperation well before any agreements are put in place.

So, DOE what will it be? Continued silence and obfuscation or honesty about the status of this misguided project? Will the project now be formally terminated or will it drag on and end in a whimper?

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