



Savannah River Site Watch

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**Columbia, SC**

[www.srswatch.org](http://www.srswatch.org)

**For Immediate Release**

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**Nuclear Regulatory Commission Issues Environmental Impact Statement on Westinghouse Nuclear Fuel Plant, Fails to Justify 40-Year Operating License Extension for Troubled Facility**

**Columbia, SC** – After years of delays due to citizen protest, operating problems and revelations of groundwater contamination with chemical and radioactive materials, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) today issued the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Westinghouse nuclear fuel plant located near Columbia, South Carolina. The EIS was prepared as part of the company’s request, originally, in 2014, to extend its operating license for an additional 40 years.

The Westinghouse plant, which began operation in 1969, makes fuel rods made from enriched uranium for commercial nuclear power plants in the U.S. and abroad. Over its many years of operation, the facility has been plagued with a long list of accidents and “events” - such as worker exposure, facility contamination and risk of nuclear criticality - as well as chronic groundwater contamination with radioactive materials and chemicals.

Disputed by members of the public at many meetings over the last few years, the EIS admits that “future inadvertent releases of contaminants to the subsurface are reasonably foreseeable,” (page xv) and that “the cumulative impacts to groundwater and surface water from past and current CFFF operations are MODERATE,” yet the NRC went ahead and recommended a 40-year license extension.

The NRC makes the absurd claim that environmental impacts of operation of the facility for 40 additional years versus an additional 20 years would be similar: “The NRC staff found that the potential environmental impacts from this alternative would be similar to the potential impacts from the proposed action except that the impacts would occur over a shorter timeframe.” (page xvi) This statement, which was in earlier documents and which was challenged by the public, is revealed to be ridiculous and misleading given that incident, events, and accidents regularly occur and are likely to increase as the facility ages.

According to Tom Clements, director of the public-interest group Savannah River Site Watch, who has monitored the Westinghouse facility for decades, the EIS is inadequate and does not justify the recommended 40- year extension of the operating license. “It has been clear from the start of the license renewal process that the NRC was going to do what Westinghouse requested in spite of a long

list of incidents at the facility and even an admission by the NRC that release of contaminants in the future was reasonably foreseeable,” said Clements. “The 40-year license extension guarantees the risk of accidents and releases that will impact the environment and possibly human health over 40 years. Unfortunately, I now anticipate that careful behavior shown by Westinghouse during the period of the EIS preparation will now be relaxed as Westinghouse is essentially now being given a license to pollute. The NRC should reconsider its recommendation and in the formal decision on the license period that is soon to come a 20-year license, at most, should be issued,” added Clements.

The EIS, prepared after an earlier environmental document was withdrawn in June 2018, was begun in July 2020 and a draft EIS was issued for public comment in July 2021. The schedule for release of the EIS was delayed several times. The official decision on the license extension, based on the “preferred alternative” in the draft EIS, will be via a “Record of Decision” (ROD). The NRC had said the ROD would be issued at the end of August but in a July 29 email that “the licensing decision is expected to be made in September.”

On a positive note, a “consent agreement” agreed between the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and Westinghouse in 2019 - but which is not regulated by the NRC - is playing a productive role in getting the site cleaned up and in reducing further releases to the environment.

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#### Notes:

**Final EIS issued by the NRC on July 29, 2022**, “Environmental Impact Statement for the License Renewal of the Columbia Fuel Fabrication Facility in Richland County, South Carolina,”  
<https://adamswebsearch2.nrc.gov/webSearch2/main.jsp?AccessionNumber=ML22201A131>

**NRC website on Westinghouse:** <https://www.nrc.gov/info-finder/fc/westinghouse-fuel-fab-fac-sc-lc.htm>

**SRS Watch report "Crossing the Line: South Carolina Nuclear Weapons Secrets Exposed" - on operations inside the Westinghouse facility related to nuclear weapons production, November 2021:**  
<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SRS-Watch-report-Westinghouse-nuclear-weapons-connection-Nov-16-2021.pdf>

**Email message sent by NRC on July 29, 2022:** “This e-mail is to inform you that the U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) staff has prepared a final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Westinghouse Electric Company, LLC’s request to renew its special nuclear material (SNM) license SNM-1107 to continue to operate its Columbia Fuel Fabrication Facility (CFFF) located in Hopkins, South Carolina for an additional 40 years. The FEIS is publicly available from the NRC webpage for the WEC’s CFFF at <https://www.nrc.gov/info-finder/fc/westinghouse-fuel-fab-fac-sc-lc.html> or at <https://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/nuregs/staff/index.html>. The licensing decision is expected to be made in September. If you have questions about accessing the EIS or would like to request a hard copy, contact Stacey Imboden at (301) 415-2462 or by e-mail at [Stacey.Imboden@nrc.gov](mailto:Stacey.Imboden@nrc.gov).”