



Savannah River Site Watch

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German Federal Government Concurs with Termination of Plan to Ship Highly Radioactive Spent Fuel from Germany to U.S. DOE's Savannah River Site in South Carolina

Decade-long Effort Funded by Germany to Develop Reprocessing Technique at SRS for Irradiated Graphite Fuel has Ended, Thus No Dumping of German Waste in Tanks and Trenches at SRS

Columbia, SC – Documents obtained from Germany make it crystal clear that plans to ship highly radioactive spent fuel from storage in Germany to the Savannah River Site in South Carolina have been terminated with the agreement of key German federal government agencies.

The documents, from a formal community meeting near the spent fuel storage site in Juelich, Germany, bring the ultimate blow to a decade-long plan to bring highly radioactive graphite spent fuel to SRS:

“Rückführung in die USA (im Einvernehmen mit der Bundesregierung BEENDET)”

“Return shipment to the USA (terminated in agreement with the federal government)”

The documents include a [presentation by the company managing the spent fuel](#), Jülicher Entsorgungsgesellschaft für Nuklearanlagen (JEN), and [the minutes of the meeting](#) held on March 6, 2023 in Juelich (in western Germany, near Aachen). The highly radioactive waste in question consists 152 casks of around 300,000 irradiated graphite balls impregnated with uranium, used as fuel in the long-closed gas-cooled AVR reactor at Juelich.

The presentation by JEN states that German federal agencies have agreed with the decision by JEN not to export the spent fuel to SRS:

“Atomaufsicht sowie Bundesministerien BMUV, BMBF, BMF schließen sich den Ausführungen der JEN an, die USA-Optionen zu beenden.”

“The nuclear supervisory authority and the federal ministries BMUV, BMBF, BMF agree with JEN's statements to end the US options.”

The nuclear licensing authority is the Federal Office for the Safety of Nuclear Waste Management (BfE). The BMUV is the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection, the BMBF is the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and BMF is the Federal Ministry of Finance. All agree with JEN's decision not to export the spent fuel, a step not known until the mentioned meeting.

“The project to import and dump German spent fuel at SRS is now fully confirmed to be dead, due to diligence of activists and concerned officials in Germany in the face of DOE efforts to keep the scheme alive,” said Tom Clements, director of Savannah River Site Watch. “The termination of this misguided project is not only an environmental victory but is also significant from a nuclear non-proliferation perspective as funding by Germany of a reprocessing technique to remove uranium from graphite fuel has also been terminated,” added Clements.

Additionally, in the Q&A period at the March 6 meeting, a JEN official stated that the research agreement between JEN and SRNL would not be renewed after the [last modification \(number 9\) ended on February 28, 2023](#). SRS Watch has an [outstanding Freedom of Information Act request](#), dated March 1, 2023, for any new agreement but an embarrassed DOE has yet to admit that no renewed agreement exists. SRS Watch has stepped in to update the public about that as DOE has so far been silent.

JEN reports three reasons for the decision not to continue with plans to export the spent fuel: 1) security for the transport on land and by sea (to Charleston, South Carolina) would be extremely costly, 2) development of the reprocessing technique (by the Savannah River National Lab) is not technologically developed and 3) issuance of an export license would not be permitted as storage in Germany is possible.

The proposal to export the spent fuel from Germany to the US emerged in 2012 and the project has faced public opposition in Germany and the US since then. In 2017, the [SRS Citizens Advisory Board \(CAB\) opposed the export](#). Also in 2017, [DOE made a commitment under the National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\)](#) to give updates to the public and the CAB about the status of the project but has repeatedly failed to do so, calling into question DOE’s commitment to honoring NEPA.

“Given DOE’s abdication of its responsibility to tell us about the status of the nuclear waste import plan, Savannah River Site Watch has assumed the role of updating the public and CAB about the project,” said Clements. “As DOE refuses to do so, we hereby once again provide the update to the public that the German-spent-fuel-import project has reached a good conclusion,” added Clements.

More project-termination details were outlined in a [SRS Watch news release of January 10, 2023](#) - SRS Watch had been told by JEN the plan was terminated by them. The twists and turns of the project were outlined in a report released by SRS in January 2023 and entitled [Auf Wiedersehen to DOE Nuclear Waste Dumping Scheme](#).

According to SRS Watch and colleagues in Germany, the spent fuel in question must now be stored in a newly licensed facility to be constructed at the same storage site, the Forschungszentrum Jülich (Jülich Research Center, FZJ) and not transported to an interim storage facility in Ahaus, Germany.

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Presentation in German: *ZUKÜNFTIGER VERBLEIB DER AVR-BRENNELEMENTEAKTUELLER STAND DER OPTIONEN – (FUTURE RETENTION OF AVR FUEL ELEMENTS - CURRENT STATUS OF OPTIONS)*, by JEN on March 6, 2023 to the “Jülicher Nachbarschaftsdialog”: https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2023-03-29_JND_Kallenbach_Optionen-AVR-BE-final.pdf

Minutes of March 6, 2023 meeting (Protokoll, 20. Sitzung des Jülicher Nachbarschaftsdialogs am 06.03.2023) – also confirm termination of the project: https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/20230306_Protokoll-JND_Sitzung-20.-Sitzung_ENTWURF.pdf