



Savannah River Site Watch

**Savannah River Site Watch
Columbia, South Carolina USA**

<https://srswatch.org/>

For Immediate Release

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**DOE's Office of Hearings and Appeals Compels the Savannah River Site to Release Key Documents
Related to Failed Decade-Long Efforts to Import Highly Radioactive Spent Fuel from Germany**

**Documents Reveal Frantic Interactions with Germany in Misguided Attempt to Import Highly
Radioactive Waste to DOE's Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina, for Processing and Dumping**

Columbia, SC – Internal U.S. Department of Energy email communication reveals that efforts to keep alive a decade-long scheme to import highly radioactive German spent fuel to the U.S. Department of Energy's Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina were unsuccessful and the effort was terminated by German authorities. The termination of the project has been celebrated by those who support clean-up at SRS of waste created as a result of production of plutonium and other materials for nuclear weapons.

Emails from 2022 and 2023, obtained via a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by the non-profit organization Savannah River Site Watch, clearly show DOE officials and the company aiming to ship the material, Edlow International, frantically working to keep the faltering project alive and that they lacked an understanding of the political situation in Germany against the export. DOE originally failed to provide the emails to SRS Watch in response to a FOIA request but SRS Watch appealed the lack of an "adequate search" to DOE's Office of Hearings and Appeals and won, compelling release of the emails.

If the project had gone forward, a large amount of irradiated graphite fuel stored in 152 casks could have been dumped at SRS with the inexplicable cooperation of the DOE's Office of Environmental Management (EM), the very office engaged in clean-up at the site. If this misguided EM effort had gone forward clean-up of the site could have been significantly complicated and delayed.

The failure of the effort to import the nuclear waste to SRS is lauded as an environmental victory by the non-profit organization Savannah River Site Watch. Likewise, the project's failure to develop a reprocessing technique to remove uranium from the irradiated graphite fuel is positive from a nuclear non-proliferation perspective.

"Boosters of the project were aiming to make financial hay from the scheme, which would have had the unacceptable outcome of more hard-to-manage nuclear waste being dumped at SRS," said Tom Clements, director of SRS Watch. "We wish that to thank our German colleagues for their diligence in making sure the highly radioactive waste stays where it is currently located in Germany."

The emails indicate that the media office at SRS was going to admit in a "comms plan" one of the reasons for termination of the project, but the explanation was quashed by a DOE official in headquarters who was desperately looking for a positive spin on the status of the failing project:

The Department of Energy has decided to stop contract negotiations for technology development and the potential acceptance and processing of German graphite-coated spent nuclear fuel spheres at the Savannah River Site. Moving forward with this effort would be

inconsistent with current priorities to accelerate mission completion, minimize risks, reduce costs, and reduce EM's long-term liability at Savannah River. A number of outstanding contract issues remain, and negotiations with the German nuclear research corporation Jülicher Entsorgungsgesellschaft für Nuklearanlagen mbH (JEN) have reached an impasse with further talks unlikely to change the respective positions on these issues. DOE will continue to welcome missions at Savannah River consistent with its goals and priorities.

In one of the emails obtained by SRS Watch, and dated October 19, 2022, JEN confirmed they were the ones who terminated the project and informed SRS about the decision. Those reasons include: illegality of export of the material from Germany, a decision to build a new storage facility where the waste is now stored, implementation of policies to minimize the risky transport of the material and failure by the Savannah River National Laboratory (SRNL) to develop a processing technique.

Consultation began in 2012 between DOE and German entities to export spent fuel from a long closed experimental gas-cooled reactor - the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Versuchsreaktor (AVR) - with research into processing of the nuclear waste being done by the Savannah River National Laboratory. The spent fuel, some of which contains U.S.-origin uranium, consists of about 290,000 uranium-impregnated irradiated graphite balls, stored in 152 robust Castor casks stored at the Forschungszentrum Jülich (Jülich Research Center, FZJ), located in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) in western Germany. The spent fuel is currently managed by the government entity Jülicher Entsorgungsgesellschaft für Nuklearanlagen mbH (JEN) and should stay at Jülich until comprehensive federal plans are developed and implemented for spent fuel disposal and not trucked to a temporary storage site in Ahaus, Germany.

SRS Watch joins German anti-nuclear colleagues and in supporting construction of a new storage facility at Jülich, or upgrading of the current facility, and no transport of the spent fuel in questions away from that current storage site. For more information from German groups, see: <https://www.westcastor.org/> and <https://www.ausgestrahlt.de/blog/2023/10/12/atomm%C3%BCll-auf-abwegen/>.

The recent emails obtained by SRS Watch and some other key documents are posted on the SRS Watch website: <https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/FOIA-German-document-list-on-SRS-Watch-Oct-23-2023.pdf>.

Meanwhile, the lawsuit by SRS Watch and other non-profit groups in federal court in Columbia, SC demanding preparation of a "programmatic Environmental Impact Statement" (PEIS) by DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) for production of plutonium "pits" for new nuclear warheads continues. In a October 19, 2023 website post - *Lawyers for SRS Watch & Allies Deal Blow to DOE Challenge to Admission of Key Documents in Federal Lawsuit concerning New Plutonium "Pits" (Cores) for New Nuclear Warheads* – the status of the case is explained: <https://srswatch.org/lawyers-for-srs-watch-allies-deal-blow-to-doe-challenge-to-admission-of-key-documents-in-federal-lawsuit-concerning-new-plutonium-pits-cores-for-new-nuclear-warheads/>

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DOE's Office of Hearings and Appeals, successful ruling for SRS Watch in FOIA appeal, August 1, 2023: <https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/FIA-23-0022-FOIA-appeal-order-August-1-2023.pdf>

Two batches of emails obtained from the Savannah River Site via FOIA requests by SRS Watch subsequent to the appeal victory concerning earlier "inadequate search", September 11, 2023: <https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SME-William-Bates-Emails-rcvd-Sep-11-2023.pdf> <https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SME-Robert-Pierce-Emails-rcvd-Sep-11-2023.pdf>

SRS initial response to SRS Watch FOIA request of September 15, 2023 related to involvement of private company Edlow International - was it formally or informally negotiating on behalf of DOE or not? <https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/SRO-2023-01811-F-Clements-first-letter-Sep-18-2023-edlow.pdf>