

**Thoughts & Observations about South Carolina’s Nuclear Weapons Factory of Doom:
Inside the \$30-Billion SRS Plutonium Bomb Factory -- Tom Clements,
Savannah River Site Watch (www.srswatch.org), Columbia, SC, on April 21, 2026 Tour**

As part of the lawsuit in which we won the Programmatic EIS, the court-approved “settlement agreement” stipulated that we could have a sit-down meeting and tour the pit-plant building at the DOE’s Savannah River Site (SRS). We received the allowed meeting and tour by gracious but reluctant National Nuclear Security Administration and contractor hosts on April 21. Informed and engaged citizens thus crossed into a gold-plated realm of nuclear weapons production that few get a first-hand glimpse of.

According to the settlement agreement of January 16, 2025:

The Parties further agree that at each annual meeting, upon Plaintiffs’ request, Plaintiffs will receive a tour of the building currently known as the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility (“MOX”)—that will become the Main Processing Building. The Parties’ agreement about annual tours is subject to this limitation:

α. Once the MOX/Main Processing Building becomes classified—as determined by the relevant government agencies, including DOE and NNSA—Plaintiffs, who do not have the requisite security clearances to observe a classified space, can no longer enter the MOX/Main Processing Building. i. If the MOX/Main Processing Building becomes classified, site counsel for Savannah River will provide declarations every six months that explain whether DOE/NNSA’s activities occurring in the MOX/Main Processing Building are in compliance with this Settlement Agreement in lieu of the annual tour.

We were told that the 2nd & 3rd floors were off limits as openings were being cut through the thick concrete walls with a water jet high-pressure blaster and the air had silica in it, which required protective equipment. But we can’t say for sure what’s on those floors as we weren’t allowed on them.

We toured part of the first floor and could see the vast size of the building and how complicated it will be to put the pit-production facility into a 500-room building designated for another use. We could see where openings were cut in the thick concrete walls, which appeared to be about a foot thick, with rebar reinforcement. Walls offering more protection appears to be near 18 inches thick. The water blaster can remove the concrete but the internal rebar, which we saw, has to be cut away with other methods.

We could see where the white wall covering – some kind of protective, easily cleanable material – had been removed from the entire facility except on metal “embeds” where attachment could be affixed in the future. Another such coating will be applied.

We could see that all MOX equipment, such as gloveboxes, and HVAC duct work and pipes and wiring had been removed from the MOX plant and scrapped as DOE reported last year. No

telling how many millions of dollars were wasted in removing what took years to place in the MOX plant. NNSA hasn't revealed that financial loss nor has Congress investigated it. Construction of the infamous MOX facility, now being morphed into a nuclear bomb factory, started in 2007 and was essentially ended in 2017, again with no investigations.

The size of the building, height of the ceilings, haphazard-appearing nature of room location, the thickness of the walls, the vast space to be filled left me pondering the huge amount of equipment that must be squeezed into the building. I could only think of trying to force the proverbial round stake into a square hole. This I going to be a tough job. I expect continuous delays, cost overruns and technical challenges, a la the MOX debacle. NNSA will sugar coat the situation at every turn and caution in what they say about such a bomb plant is called for. Workers and contractors will fight for the huge amount of funding. But can wasting \$30 billion on construction alone be sugar coated? This is not money needed for essential work at SRS – cleaning up high-level nuclear waste left over from the Cold War.

From what we saw, I think we could attest that no classified equipment had been installed. That can only come after the conclusion of the Programmatic EIS and issuance of a "Record Decision" (ROD) in favor of a "preferred alternative," meaning production of up to 205 plutonium pits per year at SRS the Los Alamos National Lab. In fact, almost no equipment has been installed in the rather bare facility.

We were taken to the roof and looked out in each direction and were told what facilities would be located around the building, such as a waste storage building and entry buildings. We could see where a giant "sand filter," though which all air from the facility would be passed, was under construction.

They claimed that the 90%-complete design would be finished in September. That the MOX project was started with a design far lower than that may have sealed its fate from the start. The poor Performance Evaluation Report (PER) for Fiscal Year 2025 looked very similar to the disastrous reports for the MOX plant well before it was on its final legs, which NNSA couldn't deny. And the real, complicated construction at the pit plant hasn't even started.

All during the tour I could only think, this project will end up costing \$30 billion, or more. And for what? Why the rush to turn an abandoned building into a facility to continue the threat of nuclear annihilation? While the base rate of pit production at the SRS facility being 50 pits per year (for new-design weapons), it is also being analyzed to produce 125 pits per year. For what? Not deterrence, as that rate is far from any amount of weapons someone might be claimed is a deterrent force. Those pits aren't needed for existing weapons. Rather it's a number that could support rapid and dangerous armament with a vast number of nuclear weapons. On the tour of the nuclear bomb factory, I kept shaking my head to myself – I was inside the heart of a new nuclear arms race that could undermine my country's security was mindlessly taking shape and at a massive and unaffordable financial cost that is robbing money from the very real needs we are collectively facing. Better build a South Carolina Chocolate Factory for the children to enjoy and spend the money more wisely.