



Savannah River Site Watch

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In an Environmental Shocker, South Carolina Proposes Investigation of Disposal of Highly Radioactive Spent Nuclear Fuel in “Boreholes,” Part of a Submission to DOE for a “Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campus” - obtained via FOIA Request by SRS Watch

S.C. Department of Commerce Comes Up Empty on New Nuclear Reactor Projects

Columbia, SC -- In a proposal not publicly released, the South Carolina Department of Commerce has informed the U.S. Department of Energy that the state has interest in investigating the disposal in “deep boreholes” of the nation’s highly radioactive spent nuclear fuel.

In a March 21, 2026 submission to DOE, the state claimed: “South Carolina is interested in exploring the potential role emerging technologies may play in the future of nuclear-fuel management, including concepts such as deep borehole disposal as a potential pathway for long-term isolation.” Such a controversial proposal was put forward absent political and public support.

The document has been kept from the public but was [obtained from the S.C. Department of Commerce on July 15, 2026 via Freedom of Information Act \(FOIA\) request](#) by the non-profit organization Savannah River Site Watch (SRS Watch).

Commercial spent fuel, stored at nuclear reactor sites around the country, is highly radioactive nuclear waste that must be isolated from the environment due to its threat to the environment and public health. There is no indication that the public would be supportive of a borehole plan, that could result in South Carolina become a dumping ground for a portion of the nation’s 100,000 metric tons of deadly irradiated nuclear fuel, via a questionable method that has not undergone technical or environmental review.

“The poorly-thought-out scheme to look into spent fuel disposal in boreholes in South Carolina should be immediately withdrawn as it could hold significant environmental, health and cost downsides that the people of South Carolina won’t tolerate,” said Tom Clements, director of Savannah River Site Watch, a public-interest group that monitors DOE’s Savannah River Site and other nuclear matters in South Carolina.

“We feel obligated to publicly release the document as the Department of Commerce has failed to act in the public interest and make it widely available,” said Clements.

The startling revelation is found in the [“Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campus” proposal](#) by [SC NEXUS](#) (in the Department of Commerce), submitted in response to a [January 28, 2026 DOE “Request for Information,” \(RFI\)](#) which solicited states to make proposals about hosting such a “nuclear campus.” Such a campus would, in theory, contain the gamut of nuclear facilities, from “small modular reactors” and “advanced reactors” - which exist only on paper - to the costly and dirty and “reprocessing” of spent fuel to remove plutonium (for which there is no demand as a nuclear fuel). The “campus” idea exists only as a concept.

The RFI states, with no evidence or scientific analysis provided, that “Deep geologic disposal facilities (including boreholes) for HLW would ensure safe, long-term isolation of radioactive waste, protecting communities and ecosystems.” (p. 12 in RFI explanation, at bottom of [sam.gov website](#))

The state’s response to DOE’s RFI, sent to DOE on March 21, makes unsubstantiated claims about job and economic impacts, is an overview of well-known resources that the Department of Commerce thinks will somehow simulate nuclear facilities to locate in the state, with the Savannah River Site area seemingly being the hub. The state’s proposal makes no concrete plans for specific nuclear facilities, names no companies participating, presents no clear timelines (beyond 2027), makes no presentation of committed private funding and fails to name any new nuclear power reactors to be located in S.C.. The state’s response to the RFI also claims credit for past and existing federal facilities at SRS, which are not under state control.

“DOE’s RFI requested plans for ‘permanent final disposition’ of spent fuel and the state buckled to DOE’s political pressure and proposed, without scientific justification and with no input by the public, the absurd and dangerous idea of borehole disposal,” Clements.

“The politically driven proposal likely changes nothing for private nuclear companies, which already know the landscape in South Carolina,” said Clements. “The state government will have little to do with what happens next on the nuclear front; that will overwhelmingly be economics and technical viability, which are now tilted heavily against new nuclear projects despite weakening of regulatory and environmental standards,” said Clements.

Perhaps the most startling thing presented in the state’s proposal concerns spent fuel disposal in boreholes. The executive director of SC NEXUS, in a public [April 13 presentation to the South Carolina Nuclear Advisory Council](#), failed to mention the borehole idea. It is unclear why the Department of Commerce, which does say more discussions with DOE are needed about final waste disposal, thinks it has expertise to speak on behalf of the state regarding high-level nuclear waste disposal in boreholes, which is a federal matter.

Likewise, the submitted document promotes reprocessing of spent fuel, which is costly and dirty and presents a proliferation risk as it would yield separated plutonium, for which there is no demand as a nuclear reactor fuel. In the April 13 presentation, it was claimed, absent documentation, that the state wants to become “the premier hub for nuclear waste reprocessing.”

The proposal, which includes a cover letter by Governor McMaster, does not even list a single author or a SC NEXUS or Department of Commerce contact.

The governor reveals in his cover letter that nobody from the public-interest sector or environmental community was involved in preparation of the one-sided document: “In preparing the state’s response to the Department’s request for information, we assembled a cross-sector steering committee including leaders from state government, research universities, the Savannah River National Laboratory, utilities, private industry, workforce institutions, and economic development organizations.” “The bias of steering committee has resulted in flawed approach and flawed document,” said Clements.

“As it’s controversial, it’s clear to me why the state has withheld the nuclear waste disposal proposal from the public and why nobody’s name appears on the document,” said Clements. “The Department of Commerce, which veered way out of its lane in promoting disposal of spent fuel in boreholes, should withdraw the idea,” added Clements.

About 25 or so states have been reported to have submitted RFIs to DOE and most of those RFIs are public. [Utah's proposal](#) and [Tennessee's proposal](#) also have proposed

looking into borehole disposal. For extremely wide boreholes, into which a spent fuel canister would fit, it is unknown if such technology exists to drill thousands of boreholes that would be need to “dispose of” the nation’s 100,000 metric tons of spent fuel. Under US law, high-level waste, such as spent fuel and vitrified high-level waste at SRS, would have to go into a “geologic repository.”

The representative of SC NEXUS, the entity in the Department of Commerce in charge of the proposal, said on April 13 that DOE would make a decision by the end of the summer about state requests that would be considered for next steps.

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Notes: Links to key documents:

Submission by SC Department of Commerce to DOE: “South Carolina: America's first fully integrated Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campus,” March 21, 2026:, obtained on July 15, 2026 in response to a FOIA request filed on July 9, 2026 by SRS Watch: <https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/SC-Nuclear-Lifecycle-Innovation-Campus-Response-provided-July-15-2026.pdf>

DOE’s January 28, 2026 “Request for Information on Establishment of Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campuses,” note attachment at bottom of page with solicitation details: <https://sam.gov/workspace/contract/opp/4e30976204964df3b556ff7149dae444/view>

Presentation by Ms. Cristina Long Paredes of the SC Department of Commerce (Executive Director, SC NEXUS), to the [SC Nuclear Advisory Council](#), April 13, 2026: [S.C. Department of Commerce - SC NEXUS RFI Overview](#) - <https://s3.amazonaws.com/cdn.sccommerce.com/scdoc-public/inline-files/SC%20Dept.%20of%20Commerce-SC%20NEXUS%20RFI%20Overview.pdf?VersionId=ea72WlmSk3.esSJKgNBdaHMSmiDgKbTN>

See archived video of April 13, 2026 meeting of the South Carolina Nuclear Advisory Council for Department of Commerce (SC NEXUS) presentation, by starting at about 2 minutes 30 seconds. Monday, April 13, 2026 1:00 pm, Governor's Nuclear Advisory Council - Part 1 - <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/video/archives.php>