SRS WATCH

Savannah River Site Watch

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DOE Hides Just-Approved, Official Cost Estimate of SRS Plutonium Pit Plant, Keeps Public in the Dark about Size of Escalating Cost for New Nuclear Weapons Facility, Cost could Soar to Over $30 Billion

New Estimate Likely to Go Higher than 2026 Unofficial Estimate of $18-25 Billion, More than Doubling the 2021 Official Estimate of $7-11 Billion - Just to Refurbish the Terminated MOX Plant, into which $5-8 Billion has already been Sunk

Columbia, SC -- The Department of Energy claimed on October 16, 2026 that it approved a new cost estimate for the massive facility to make 50 or more plutonium pits per year - for new nuclear weapons' cores - at the Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina, but the department has refused to publicly release the estimate. It is believed that the cost for the new facility could soar above a recent unofficial cost estimate of $30 billion.

It was anticipated that the new cost estimate for the plutonium bomb plant, per DOE practice, would be publicly released. That the cost has not been released raises suspicion that the skyrocketing cost to refurbish the partially finished, terminated plutonium fuel (MOX) building is being hidden from both the public and Congress.

"DOE must immediately reveal what the cost to the taxpayer will be to produce new, unneeded plutonium pits at SRS for new nuclear warheads," said Tom Clements, director of the public interest group Savannah River Site Watch, based in Columbia, SC. "It's clear that the cost of the unnecessary plutonium pit project continues to soar while the schedule slips, which is the way DOE works, and it's time for Congress to

place a hold on construction while the cost and need for the facility are assessed. Suppression of the cost estimate by DOE is a mistake that will backfire as it smacks of a cover-up," added Clements.

Late on Friday, October 16, DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) quietly posted on line a short news statement, stating that DOE had approved a new "performance baseline" for the budget-busting SRS pit- production project. According to the pertinent DOE directive for new capital-intensive projects, the "total project cost" (TPC) is to be part of the performance baseline, but DOE failed to publicly release the long-awaited cost estimate.

Release of a new, official cost estimate is part of what is called "Critical Decision-2" ()CD-2), one of four steps in the decision-making chain for large, costly, technically challenging projects. DOE also said that it had approved "Critical Decision-3" (CD-3) on the controversial pit project on October 15, 2026. CD-3 is made when DOE determines that "a project is ready to complete all construction, implementation, procurement, fabrication" activities. This was done in combined approval of CD-2/3, which has been anticipated for several years.

"DOE must make public the CD-2/3 document so the projected cost and schedule of the SRS plutonium pit project can be seen," said Clements.

The DOE nuclear weapons budget request for Fiscal Year 2027, of April 2026, indicated that DOE was using a $25 billion "budgetary placeholder" figure for the pit-plant refurbishment cost. But there has been no official cost estimate since June 2021, when a project-start decision (Critical Decision-1) was made, with a cost estimate of $6.9 to $11.1 billion, with a projected release of CD-2 in Fiscal Year 2024. With the release in October 2026 of CD-2/3, it's clear the official cost estimate has likely more than doubled and the operational date (Critical Decision-4) slipped over 2 years since issuance of CD-1. Operation of the pit plant has likely slipped to 2035 or later.

"What we have with the SRS pit plant is yet another complicated and poorly managed DOE construction project that has spun out of control with both the soaring cost and delayed schedule," said Clements. "The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has warned about such mismanaged DOE projects and GAO should immediately review the DOE's cost figures and schedule milestones. Additionally, DOE is withholding and must release a key document that calls into question the entire pit project - titled "Plutonium

Aging" - which states that new pits are not now needed to to assure the performance of nuclear warheads," added Clements.

A Programmatic EIS (PEIS) on operation of the SRS pit plant and a similar facility at DOE's Los Alamos site is currently underway, with a Final PEIS expected in 2027. That PEIS was won by public interest plaintiffs - Tom Clements (as an individual), Savannah River Site Watch, Nuclear Watch New Mexico, Tri-Valley CAREs (Livermore, CA) and the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition - in a court-mandated "settlement agreement" in January 2025. That settlement agreement stipulated a tour of the pit plant by plaintiffs - which took place on April 21, 2026 - and specifically prohibited placement of classified equipment in the SRS pit plant until the PEIS was finalized and a Record of Decision issued.

"DOE should announce that implementation of the CD-2/3 decision has been placed on hold until the final pit-project PEIS is completed and a Record of Decision is issued," said Clements.

Notes:

DOE statement of October 16, 2026: "**NNSA Baselines Savannah River Plutonium Processing Facility,"** with no cost estimate made public **-** https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/articles/nnsa-baselines-savannah-river-plutonium-processing-facility

DOE Order 413.3C (approved 8-5-2026) - "**PROGRAM AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR THE ACQUISITION OF CAPITAL ASSETS –** explains CD-1 to CD-4 and associated requirements - https://www.energy.gov/documents/doe-o-413-3-cprogram-and-project-management-acquisition-capital-assets2026-07-23pdf

DOE statement of June 21, 2021 **"NNSA approves Critical Decision 1 for Savannah River Plutonium Processing Facility,"** with a cost estimate of $6.9-11.1 billion for the SRS pit plant - https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/articles/nnsa-approves-critical-decision-1-savannah-river-plutonium-processing-facility

DOE "Weapons Activities" budget request for Fiscal Year 2027, April 3, 2026, with an unofficial "Total Project Cost" for the SRS pit plant of $18-25 billion - https://www.energy.gov/documents/doe-fy-2027-volume-1-wa

"Settlement Agreement" of January 16, 2025, in which plaintiffs and DOE agreed that NNSA would prepared a Programmatic EIS on pit production: https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/final-settlement-PEIS-lawsuit-Jan-16-2025.pdf