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SRS Begins Down-Blend Operations for 6 MT of Plutonium

AIKEN, S.C. (Sept. 30, 2016) – Savannah River Site (SRS) personnel began efforts yesterday that will result in the processing and permanent disposal of six metric tons of surplus non-pit plutonium.

The down-blending process, now underway in the SRS K Area Complex, blends plutonium oxide with an inert material, producing a mixture that is more secure and not usable for weapons. The startup of this work resumes a process that SRS successfully carried out in the HB Line Facility in 2012 to down-blend plutonium. After material is diluted it will be stored at the SRS Solid Waste Management facility and, as stated in the Record of Decision (ROD), will be placed in the appropriate queue of material that will ultimately be disposed of at Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

The Energy Department's decision to down-blend this material and ship it to WIPP was announced in March and published in the Federal Register on April 5 as the ROD on the Final Surplus Plutonium Disposition Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

This project does not involve plutonium originally intended for disposition through the MOX Fuel Fabrication Facility. However, this is the same down-blending process that NNSA has proposed as an alternative to the MOX approach.

"SRS performs an invaluable role in addressing national security and nonproliferation objectives," said Jack Craig, SRS Manager. "With today's startup, we are taking an important step in fulfilling the Energy Department's commitment to move plutonium out of South Carolina and into permanent disposal."

Extensive preparations for today's startup included a revision of the facility's safety analysis to reflect the down-blending process, developing operational and safety procedures, training personnel on the down-blending process, and performing a readiness assessment to demonstrate that the facility's workforce and equipment are prepared to begin down-blending operations.

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