The Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board's Position on the President's 2015 Budget Proposal

The Savannah River Site began operations in 1952 producing various materials to support the nation's Defense Department in its development of a nuclear weapons program. The site also developed a variety of nuclear materials for other uses including medical isotopes and the space exploration program. The various projects provided essential support for our national defense, research and other programs and the community benefited through growth and quality of life. The local community has always strongly supported the Site and the Site has been a valued member of the community.

The primary mission of the Savannah River Site has changed from production to cleanup. Cleanup includes waste materials remaining from years of nuclear production and other sources such as foreign research reactor materials.

The materials to be cleaned up include 37 million gallons of liquid and solid (sludge) wastes stored in aging carbon steel tanks. Some of these date back more than 50 years. Similar tanks have been discovered leaking in Hanford located in Washington. The waste in the SRS tanks continues to be described as the most hazardous environmental risk in the State of South Carolina. Leaks from these tanks could potentially contaminate the ground water and get into the Savannah River which is the source of the drinking water for communities down river of SRS including Savannah.

In development of FY 2015 budget, and the ongoing continuing resolution, the Site Treatment Plan Liquid Waste System Plan Rev 17 calls for emptying and operationally closing the remaining tanks by 2028. The process for cleaning a tank consists of removing the bulk of the nuclear waste from the tanks treating and stabilizing this waste, and with the consent of regulators grouting the tanks and any small residual levels of waste in the tanks with grout.

The cleanup of the tanks is the subject of Enforceable Agreements with the State of South Carolina and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The Public expects the Department of Energy to meet the commitments that have been made.

In July 2014, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission released a Consultative Technical Evaluation Report for H-Area Tank Farm pursuant to the Ronald W. Reagan National Defense Authorization Act of 2005. The evaluation found that DOE should continue to evaluate efficiency of various tank cleaning technologies, continue to explore methods to improve estimates of residual waste volumes, and conduct additional analysis to demonstrate long-term stability. The report also found that DOE should conduct waste release experiments, as well as conducting a more comprehensive analysis of containment release from tank annuli.

As of August 2014, L-Basin, a 3.4 million gallon "swimming pool" stores an inventory of 3072 bundles of both domestic and foreign spent nuclear fuel. The pool's maximum capacity is 3650 bundles. Ongoing consideration is underway for expanding storage, including the potential addition of dry-cask storage. The Savannah River National Laboratory conducted a 2011 study on fuel and basin life extension, and found that the basin's fuel inventory could be safely stored for at least an additional 50

years, contingent upon continuation of management activities. At this time, a final disposition path and long-term repository has yet to be established. The 2015 President's Budget Request for Nuclear Material is $260 million, down $12 million from 2014. Funding for Used Nuclear Fuel (L-Area) in the FY 2015 President's Request is $43 million, down $2 million from 2014.

FY14 funding for Liquid Waste is $566M including SDU6. FY15 President's Budget for Liquid Waste is $588M including SDU6 ($551M + 37M). The Liquid Waste Budget based on the President's Budget Request is increased $22M from the FY14 Enacted Budget. However, due to increase in pension, the funding left for Liquid Waste scope of work is effectively the same level as FY14.Through the Liquid Waste Disposition Program, the Savannah River Site plans to disposition 1 Mgal of liquid salt waste through Actinide Removal Process/Modular Caustic Side Solvent Extraction Unit, produce 120-130 canisters of vitrified high-level waste at Defense Waste Processing Facility, continue Salt Waste Processing Facility construction, and continue construction of saltstone disposal unit 6.

The DOE has until 2028 to meet clean-up milestones, and with the projected budget, the mission will be delayed a decade, until 2039. While no tanks are actively leaking, some tanks have leak sites, which require additional maintenance to mitigate safety risks of reaching the water table. Savannah River Site is a unique facility that is currently running at between ½ and 1/3 of its full capacity. The only way to meet milestones is to operate the site at increased capacity, which would require requesting additional funding.

The impacts of the budget cuts include:

1. Forgoing the increase in the treatment capacity of Actinide Removal Process/Modular Caustic Side Solvent Extraction Unit by the planned 300%
2. Reducing the production of vitrified canisters by 67% from almost 300 / yr. to 100 per year
3. Delaying the construction of Saltstone facilities to stabilize the extracted water
4. Delaying development of storage for glass canisters and additional infrastructure to further increase salt waste treatment capability

There is no reason to believe that if these cuts are made now, that the needed funding will be restored in the future. It is also clear that the total project costs will be much higher if the program is delayed than if is completed on schedule.

Even if funding is restored in future years, the setbacks to the Liquid Waste program due to FY 14 reductions will make it difficult if not impossible to be able to meet the commitments that have been made in the Enforceable Agreements. Most critically, the citizens of South Carolina and Georgia will be placed at increasing risk due to the failure of the tanks that have already exceeded their useful life. The costs of remediation if a tank failure occurs will far exceed the short term savings. The remediation costs will be in addition the higher program costs due to a delayed schedule.

At this time, there is a belief that the 2015 budget will simply be a continuing resolution from the 2014 budget. Under the constraints of that budget, clean-up completion by the target milestone is a near impossibility, and that violates the federal government's commitment to clean-up the environment. The potential fines for failing to reach the milestones could be $105,000 per day, totaling up to $154 million.

The Savannah River Citizen's Advisory Board strongly believes that full funding should be restored to the Liquid Waste Cleanup program. The budget restoration makes sense in the financial long term and from a safety perspective for the workers at SRS and the people of the region.

Position Statement approved at September 2014 Full Board meeting. This paper will be up for renewal September 2015