

SRS CAB Position Statement on
Interim or Long Term Storage of Commercial Spent Nuclear Fuel and High-Level Waste

Background:

The Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA) of 1982, created a timetable for the creation of a deep geologic repository for disposal of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste, including such wastes at Savannah River Site. The permanent repository was slated by the NWPA to begin receiving commercial and defense wastes by the middle of the next decade (1995). After over two decades of site studies, DOE filed a construction license application in 2008. However, in 2009 the President determined the proposed location “is not a workable option” and tasked a Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) to find alternatives. The BRC issued its final report in 2012, and included among its recommendations to: (1) develop one or more consolidated interim storage facilities and (2) provide for the siting and development of one or more deep geological disposal facilities. In December 2015, DOE formally initiated a consent-based siting process for storing and disposing of America’s nuclear wastes and the President tasked DOE with establishing a separate disposal site for defense wastes.

Discussion:

The 2013 DOE response to the BRC recommendations states that over the next ten years it plans to implement a program to make a disposal site available “...by 2048” – over 50 years after the date intended by the NWPA. DOE’s poor track record in managing large capital projects indicates the likelihood that this estimate will only elongate. In the meantime, DOE will attempt to establish consolidated interim storage sites for spent nuclear fuel and/or high level waste and may consider Savannah River Site a suitable site despite its close proximity to water and population centers.

Conclusions:

- a. Creation of consolidated interim storage sites for spent nuclear fuel and/or high-level waste will be extremely costly and create a disincentive to promptly establish a permanent repository.
- b. The construction of alternate repository location(s) is, at best, generations away and it is highly unlikely the currently proposed 2048 availability date will be adhered to.
- c. Pending establishment of new repository location(s), DOE may consider the Savannah River Site a suitable alternative for consolidated interim storage of spent nuclear fuel and/or high level radioactive waste.
- d. Continued disposition of surplus nuclear material will add to SRS’ long term waste storage liability.
- e. SRS has not been adequately evaluated under the National Environmental Policy Act for storage of spent nuclear fuel and/or high-level waste for the long time period likely to occur under DOE’s current strategy.

CAB POSITION STATEMENT:

Based on the foregoing, the Savannah River Site Citizens Advisory Board:

1. Opposes storage of commercial spent nuclear fuel and high level radioactive waste at the Savannah River Site until 2048 or longer.
2. Urges DOE to stabilize and remove such waste from SRS as soon as possible.