



Recommendation No. 93

July 27, 1999

Federal Facility Agreement Modification Feasibility Study Scoping and Primary Document Quality

Background

The Federal Facility Agreement (FFA) identifies the Savannah River Site (SRS) waste units and the schedule by which they will be evaluated and remediated if necessary. It provides milestones for preparing the regulatory required evaluation and decision documents. The appendices containing these milestones are updated annually. The FFA and its annual updates are approved by the Department of Energy - Savannah River (DOE-SR), the Environmental Protection Agency Region 4 (EPA-IV) and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC).

The EPA-IV and SCDHEC requested a suspension of all Appendix D and E time-tables and deadlines for ten Operable Units (i.e., waste units; see Ref.1). The DOE-SR has responded to this request by concurring in eight of the suspensions, disagreeing with two, and adding three more to the suspension list (Ref. 2). This leaves eleven waste units to be suspended out of a total of 64 being worked on during this fiscal year.

The temporary suspension (of about 4 months) is for the purpose of improving the remedy evaluation process for waste sites at SRS. In particular, it is highly desired to reduce the number of revisions that have been occurring in the Feasibility Study (FS) documents. The SRS Citizens Advisory Board has continually stressed the need to streamline and shorten the time between waste unit identification and completion of remediation field work (see CAB Recommendations 28, 31, 35, 38, 46, 48, 50, 53, 59, 64, 68, and 76). In the early 1990s it was taking on average 5 years and \$3 million dollars (depending on the amount of effort needed for characterization) to reach a decision on the remedy prior to remediation in the field. By the mid-1990s the schedule had been shortened to about 3 years. This improvement, however, was one of the reasons for the current work suspension because the shortened schedule starts the Feasibility Study four months prior to the completion of the Baseline Risk Assessment. This overlap has led to many of the revisions in the Feasibility Studies. Additional approaches have been made to shorten (and decrease the cost) between start of investigation and decision on remediation with implementation of the Approved Standardized Corrective Action Design (ASCAD [TM]) and Plug-In Record of Decision (ROD) processes. While both of these processes are similar in speeding up the regulatory process, the ASCAD [TM] process focuses on a standardized design for the studies and streamlining the regulatory documentation leading up to a remedial decision whereas the Plug-In ROD focuses on a common remedial action for multiple, similar waste units.

The SRS Citizens Advisory Board is unhappy that we were not informed of the concerns which led to the work suspension (Ref. 1 & 2). We greatly regret the work suspension on progress towards remediation of the 11 waste units. The Board believes accomplishment of remediation in the field (if necessary for a particular site) is more important than administrative processes. The Board also believes that the cost of the evaluation studies and the required regulatory reports (including their review and approval) should be a small percentage of the actual cost of remediation. We are especially concerned that this is not true for the SRS waste units, which pose little threat to the environment or to the public.

Recommendation

The SRS Citizens Advisory Board recommends that the three Agencies:

1. Ensure that another suspension does not occur.
2. Provide the SRS Citizens Advisory Board with a list of the items which caused the suspension and the actions being taken to resolve them. Explain the difference between the sites proposed by the regulators and by DOE. Do both by September 1, 1999.
3. Restart any suspended work on these 11 waste units as soon as possible in all cases or no later

than November 15, 1999, in any single case.

4. Provide by September 1, 2000, a report which draws a pre-suspension and post suspension comparison on the number of all regulatory documents that go past Revision 1, and provide an update annually.

References

1. Letter to Brian T. Hennessey (DOE-SR) from Jeff Crane (EPA-IV) and Keith A. Collinworth (SCDHEC), Non-major Federal Facilities Agreement Modification Feasibility Study Scoping and Primary Document Quality, May 18, 1999.
2. Letter to K. A. Collinworth (SCDHEC) and J. L. Crane (EPA-IV) from Brian T. Hennessey (DOE-SR), Non major Federal Facility Agreement Modification for Suspension of FY99 Appendices D and E Milestones, June 17, 1999.

Agency Responses

Tri-Party Response