



NEWS

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NNSA Moves Ahead with Plutonium Disposition Program

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) issued an Amended Record of Decision today stating that it will move forward with its previously proposed strategy of fabricating approximately 6.5 metric tons of surplus U.S. weapon-grade plutonium previously intended for immobilization into mixed oxide (MOX) fuel at the Savannah River Site.

The decision is part of a Bush administration restructuring of the U.S. plutonium disposition program, which will dispose of 34 metric tons of surplus weapon-grade plutonium by turning the material into MOX fuel for use in nuclear reactors. This action amends the January 2000 Record of Decision for the Surplus Plutonium Disposition Environmental Impact Statement.

“Today’s decision moves us one step closer to disposing of weapon-grade plutonium both here in the United States and in Russia,” NNSA Acting Administrator Linton Brooks said. “It also strengthens our effort to provide a pathway out of South Carolina for plutonium brought there for disposition.”

In September 2000, the United States and Russia agreed to dispose of 68 metric tons of surplus weapon-grade plutonium. Both countries will dispose of their plutonium by irradiating it as MOX fuel in existing nuclear reactors, making the plutonium no longer readily usable for nuclear weapons.

The next major milestone for the plutonium disposition program, scheduled for fiscal year (FY) 2004, is obtaining a construction license from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for the U.S. MOX facility, to be followed by the start of construction of that facility, in parallel with construction of a similar facility planned in Russia.

The facility is currently scheduled to start operations in FY 2008. When fully operational, the facility will produce 3.5 metric tons of MOX fuel per year. Over the life of the program, the U.S. will dispose of enough surplus plutonium for thousands of nuclear weapons.

NNSA is a semi-autonomous agency of the Department of Energy. It enhances U.S. national security through the military application of nuclear energy, maintains the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile, promotes international nuclear non-proliferation and safety, reduces global danger from weapons of mass destruction, provides the U.S. Navy with safe and effective nuclear propulsion, and oversees national laboratories to maintain U.S. leadership in science and technology.

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