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For Immediate Release

SRS BEGINS FINAL CLEANING OF NEXT TWO RADIOACTIVE WASTE TANKS SCHEDULED FOR CLOSURE

AIKEN, S.C. (July 16) – An acid addition to two Savannah River Site liquid radioactive waste storage tanks marks the final cleaning step in the Site’s tank closure process for these two tanks.

The two 750,000-gallon tanks, Tanks 5 and 6, are no longer in use and are designated as non-compliant. Both are scheduled to be closed in 2010, years ahead of the Federal Facility Agreement requirement of 2015.

“Chemical cleaning is a significant step in actively working toward permanently closing our waste tanks,” said Terrel Spears, Assistant Manager for Waste Disposition Project, DOE-Savannah River Operations Office. “This process will remove as much of the remnant waste as practical. Ultimately, it will mean we’ll have very little waste left in the tank to secure in grout.”

Safely closing waste tanks involves an intricate set of steps that includes emptying the waste tanks of bulk waste, then removing as much of the residual waste as possible through various technologies and techniques. Once that’s complete, the tanks can be filled with grout, a cement-like material created especially for these waste tanks. This grouting process permanently seals the tanks from future use while binding the residual waste into the grout.

Before the grouting step, as much waste as practical is removed from the tank, which is where Tanks 5 and 6 are in the closure process. In the case of Tank 5, more than 24,500 gallons of sludge has been reduced to about 3,400 gallons before this final cleaning began. Tank 6 had more than 24,900 gallons of waste reduced to about 6,000 gallons before the current cleaning began. However, as the amount of waste gets smaller, the job of waste removal becomes more difficult.

The residual waste left after thorough cleaning, known as a “heel,” is hard to remove because it’s almost a part of the tank. It becomes hardened from a combination of decades of simply staying in place, and, in some places in tanks, some of the chemical materials left behind bond to the tank floor.

(more)

The WSRC Team:

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Tank Cleaning

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The current Tank 5 and 6 heel removals involve three separate oxalic acid strikes. The oxalic acid used in the chemical cleaning dissolves the heel so it can be easily flushed from the tank. Those acid strikes are taking place now.

“Our team has been impressive working through a variety of challenges in preparing these tanks for this final cleaning process,” said Dave Olson, Washington Savannah River Company’s Executive Vice President of Liquid Waste Operations. “I’m proud of the safe and effective manner in which our workers have performed. They have been innovative while demonstrating ownership for this project.”

Chemical cleaning has been performed once before – in 1980 on Tank 16. The results of that effort were used to further develop and refine the chemical cleaning efforts for Tanks 5 and 6.

The material from Tanks 5 and 6 will be transferred into Tank 7 for future disposal.

Chemical cleaning of both tanks is scheduled to be completed by the end of September.

SRS is owned by DOE and operated by a team of companies led by the Washington Savannah River Company, a subsidiary of URS Washington Division.

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