

Media contact: Dean Campbell
(803) 952-9416
dean.campbell@srs.gov

SRS Successfully Resumes Saltstone Operations

The Savannah River Site continues to lead the DOE complex in the safe disposition of radioactive waste

AIKEN, S.C. (October 24, 2007) — An important step toward the closure of additional radioactive waste tanks at the Savannah River Site (SRS) was recently taken by the Department of Energy (DOE) and Washington Savannah River Company (WSRC) with the resumption of operations at the Saltstone Processing and Disposal Facilities (Saltstone).

“After several important enhancements to this vital cleanup process, we are continuing our mission to permanently disposition low-activity salt solutions in a solid and environmentally safe form,” said Terrel Spears, Assistant Manager for Waste Disposition Project, DOE-Savannah River Operations Office. “Resuming operations at Saltstone is an important step towards safely closing our tank farm system and reducing risk posed by the radioactive liquid waste currently stored at SRS.”

To date, SRS is the only site within the DOE complex to have processed and permanently dispositioned salt solutions removed from waste tanks. In March 2007, the first major salt processing milestone was achieved by SRS personnel, with over 100,000 gallons of low-activity salt solution safely mixed with cementitious materials and poured as a concrete-like mixture into large vaults for permanent disposition at Saltstone. In addition to this accomplishment, over one million gallons of salt waste has been prepared for transfer to Saltstone as well.

The low-activity salt waste successfully dispositioned in March was comprised of low-activity waste solutions from H Canyon and Effluent Treatment Project (ETP) operations, as well as a small demonstration quantity of waste derived from the Deliquification, Dissolution and Adjustment (DDA) process. This waste represents a very small fraction of the total volume of salt solutions scheduled to be transferred to Saltstone for permanent disposition in the future.

Until recently, further processing of low-activity salt waste had been suspended due to an appeal of the modified permit needed to operate the Saltstone facilities. In August 2007, a settlement agreement was reached, concluding litigation that could have further impacted SRS cleanup efforts. With the terms of the settlement agreement implemented and process improvements completed, Saltstone has now resumed operations for the safe disposal of low-activity salt waste in support of DOE’s risk reduction priority.

(more)

The WSRC Team:

Washington Savannah River Company LLC • Bechtel Savannah River, Inc. • BNG America Savannah River Corporation
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Saltstone Resumes Operation

Page 2

Saltstone consists of two facility segments: Saltstone Production Facility (SPF) and Saltstone Disposal Facility (SDF). Construction of SPF and the first two vaults of SDF were completed between February 1986 and July 1988. The Saltstone Facility started radioactive operations on June 12, 1990. Since that time and until recently, it has been operated on an intermittent, as-needed basis to immobilize and dispose of low-activity liquid waste from the ETP, which processes waste from the Site's two chemical separation facilities, as well as from the tank farms. In the future, Saltstone will ramp up to accommodate, not only ETP receipts and H Canyon low-level waste, but also the low-activity waste from salt processing activities, including DDA, the Modular Caustic Side Solvent Extraction Process (scheduled for startup in March 2008) and the Salt Waste Processing Facility (which is currently under construction).

The existing concrete vaults used at Saltstone are divided into sections (called cells). Each cell is 100 feet long, 100 feet wide and 25 feet tall. Currently, two vaults exist at Saltstone, one with 12 cells and one with six cells. Additional Saltstone vaults will be constructed as needed in the future. Final closure of the area will consist of covering the vaults with engineered closure caps and backfilling with earth.

"The hard work and perseverance displayed by our workforce has been admirable," said Dave Olson, WSRC Executive Vice President, Liquid Waste Operations. "Long hours of training and extensive upgrades to our equipment have been the focal point of our successful resumption of operations at Saltstone."

The Savannah River Site continues to be a leader within the DOE complex regarding the safe and effective disposition of liquid radioactive waste. First-of-a-kind achievements involving waste removal, disposition and tank closure have and will continue to occur at SRS.

SRS is owned by the U.S. Department of Energy and operated by a team of companies led by the Washington Savannah River Company, a subsidiary of Washington Group International.

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