

DOE**NEWS****NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:**
April Kaufman 202/586-5806**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**
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Department of Energy Fines Savannah River Contractor \$110K for Nuclear Safety Violations

The Department of Energy (DOE) this week issued a Preliminary Notice of Violation and levied a \$110,000 fine against the Westinghouse Savannah River Company (WSRC), operator of its Savannah River Site in Aiken, S.C., for recurring violations of procedures used to ensure equipment and materials important to safety are properly designed, constructed and installed.

"We can't emphasize enough how important it is that our contractors correct problems with the procurement of items that affect nuclear safety," said Dr. David Michaels, DOE's Assistant Secretary for Environment, Safety and Health. "While it was fortunate in this case that there were no consequences to workers or the public, these violations demonstrate a significant and recurring lack of adherence to established processes that ensure important safety equipment and materials are built and perform as intended."

Last August, fines associated with similar procurement-related issues were assessed against Kaiser-Hill and Bechtel BWXT Idaho, the companies with whom DOE contracts to operate the department's Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site outside Denver, Colo., and the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory in Idaho Falls. The Energy Department is also evaluating similar problems at other facilities across the country.

The Preliminary Notice of Violation describes multiple failures in WSRC's processes to procure acceptable nuclear waste containers. In 1997, for example, WSRC purchased six containers for onsite handling and temporary storage of transuranic waste at the Savannah River Site. The department's investigation found that WSRC did not require the supplier to use quality controls that would ensure the boxes were structurally sound and met established safety requirements. WSRC itself later determined it could not guarantee the integrity of the containers.

DOE also cited WSRC for failing to correct longstanding quality problems associated with the procurement and acceptance of nuclear safety equipment, dating back to a previous Notice of Violation issued in November 1997. The 1997 violation involved procurement of safety-grade equipment for the site's Defense Waste Processing Facility operations.

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The Preliminary Notice of Violation requires WSRC to take appropriate and effective corrective actions. The company has already completed a root cause analysis of the quality control problems and developed a corrective action plan that identifies more than 60 actions that have been or will be taken to prevent problems from recurring. Actions include revising existing and developing new procurement procedures, as well as plans to evaluate and redefine responsibilities for transporting nuclear waste. The department will validate the actions and determine whether further enforcement action is required.

The notice will become final in 30 days unless WSRC provides sufficient justification and information to rebut the findings of the enforcement action.

The Preliminary Notice of Violation is issued under the Price-Anderson Act, which allows the Department of Energy to fine contractors for safety violations. A copy of the violation is available on the Internet at: <http://tis.eh.doe.gov/enforce>.

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