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Saltstone Successfully Resumes Operations

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

An important step toward the closure of additional radioactive waste tanks at SRS was recently taken by DOE and WSRC with the resumption of operations at the Saltstone Processing and Disposal Facilities.

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.

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.

"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.

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