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SRS ships off unneeded plutonium



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The Savannah River Site’s management and operations contractor combined with other sites to remove a collection of 26 sealed plutonium-238 sources from the site.

The analytical lab at the Savannah River Nuclear Solutions tritium facilities was using the plutonium, according to a press release.

The lab needed the sealed sources as standards for marking the equipment used to validate tritium-loading operations.

In 2013, employees demonstrated that electrical heat standards designed by SRNS served just as well as, if not better than, the plutonium-based standards, clearing the way to eliminate the sources.

“These sources have been safely managed without incident throughout their use at SRS,” said Lee Schifer, the director of tritium operations. “But properly managing plutonium-238 requires significant cost and effort. It just made good sense to find a way to disposition them once they were no longer needed.”

The SRNS team identified the Off-Site Source Recovery Project and the Los Alamos National Lab as partners in the process. The recovery project is sponsored by the National Nuclear Security Administration and was identified as the appropriate partner for disposition. Since 1999, the project has carried out its mission to remove excess, unwanted, abandoned or orphaned radioactive sealed sources that pose a potential risk to health, safety, and national security.

The removal of the plutonium sources from SRS will result in significant cost and risk reductions, according to SRNS.

“The costs for calibration, inventory and monitoring to ensure that the sealed sources are not posing a safety hazard will no longer be incurred, and the measures to control and account for the sealed sources, will no longer be needed,” the contractor wrote.

SRNS is a Fluor-led company whose members are Fluor Federal Services, Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell and responsible for the management and operations at the Site.

Derrek Asberry is the SRS beat reporter for the Aiken Standard.