

Residents show mixed feelings on German fuel at SRS

By Derrek Asberry from the Aiken Standard

Georgia Sierra Club member Sam Booher asked the crowd at the North Augusta Community Center a simple question: Does opening the door for Germany mean the Savannah River Site is opening the door for other countries' nuclear material?

Booher was one of several on Tuesday who stated his position on SRS potentially accepting highly-enriched uranium, or HEU, from Germany during a public comment meeting.

“This is the only place in the United States for this type of storage, so is everything going to be coming here?” he asked.

The meeting proved to be a mixed bag of individuals and organizations, with some approving of SRS accepting the material and others opposing it.

Advocates for accepting the material included the Augusta Metro Chamber of Commerce, the Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness and the SRS Retiree Association, who made comments via John Plodinec, the immediate past chair of the organization.

“The Savannah River National Laboratory is the only facility in this country (and one of only a few in the entire world) with the physical infrastructure and human capital needed to perform these studies in a safe and technically defensible manner,” Plodinec said.

Those who opposed accepting the HEU included the South Carolina Sierra Club and SRS

Watch, which voiced its disapproval through Director Tom Clements.

According to Clements, Germany is currently trying to rename the reactors that process the spent fuel as research reactors instead of commercial reactors, which would make it legal to ship the HEU.

“There's a big difference between the reactors, and the German law is clear. Evidently, the German government is conducting an assessment to rename them, but they're meeting friction from activists in Germany,” Clements said.

Before comments were made, Maxine Maxted, from DOE-SR, gave a more in-depth analysis of the process behind the German spent fuel.

Maxted said it was part of the Atoms for Peace Program under President Dwight D. Eisenhower to make the uranium available to all countries who wanted it for research. Giving it to multiple countries prevented any one country from starting up a weapons program, she said.

“As part of the agreement, the U.S. agreed to take the material back when the countries were done with the research,” she explained.

The Site recently surfaced as a potential location for the fuel, which contains approximately 900-kilograms of HEU. All the work associated with the project would be funded by Germany.

Tuesday's meeting will be followed by further analysis on the issue, another public comment period and the issuing of a final environmental assessment.

The public can still submit comments via email to Drew.Grainger@srs.gov or through mail to Drew Grainger, NEPA Compliance Officer German HEU Fuel Environmental Assessment U.S. Department of Energy, P.O. Box A, Aiken, South Carolina 29801. The public has until July 21 to submit comments.

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