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SRNS Replaces Radioactive Source to Protect Employees from Radiation

Cobalt-60 plays a vital role in worker health and safety at SRS

AIKEN, S.C. – March 30, 2015 – Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, LLC (SRNS) specializes in management of nuclear materials, but that work goes beyond just national security needs and disposition of legacy materials.

As seen recently when a Cobalt-60 source was removed, rehousing, and replaced to service; the technology at work at the Savannah River Site (SRS) utilizes highly radioactive materials to keep radiation detection instruments operating correctly, and even plays an important role in keeping employees safe.

The Cobalt-60 source, no bigger than a human thumb, is a critical element to ensuring that radiological detectors are calibrated. Housed in a small metal casing, known as a “rabbit,” the Cobalt-60 source emits targeted radiation at various levels, which ensures that radioactivity monitors are operating properly, and measuring doses accurately.

Two weeks ago, a specialized team of SRNS employees and subcontractors, carefully orchestrated the removal of the Cobalt-60 from its home within SRS’ Health Physics Instrument Calibration Laboratory. Once removed it was transported to an offsite location to be rehousing in a new “rabbit” and returned to SRS.



SRNS Employees remove the shielded cask carrying a Cobalt 60 source, used for the calibration of radioactivity monitors at SRS.

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When it was returned back to its home in the Health Physics Instrument Calibration Laboratory employees carefully moved the Cobalt-60 source in a protective cask, which provided shielding from radiation. To replace it into the Gamma Beam Irradiator within the lab, a carefully choreographed work plan was developed, with each employee understanding their role and responsibility in the process.

Once replaced, the Cobalt-60 source was put back into service where it will continue to calibrate radioactivity monitors that are deployed into various areas across the Site. These monitors measure radioactivity in-and-around SRS facilities, the environment and on humans.

“It’s imperative that we have accurate dose readings in all aspects of the work that we conduct at SRS,” said Gordon Quillin, SRNS, Director of Radiological Protection Department. “Cobalt-60 affords us with impeccable quality control, ensuring that our radioactivity monitoring tools are accurate and employees are protected from radioactivity.”

Cobalt-60 has an important role in many industries. The Gamma Knife, used in the treatment of complex brain tumors, allows physicians to treat cancerous tumors deep within the brain by targeting radioactive therapy directly to the tumor, while preventing damage to the surrounding tissue.

Cobalt-60 is not a naturally occurring element. It is created by bombarding Cobalt with neutrons produced in nuclear reactors.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions is a Fluor-led company whose members are Fluor Federal Services, Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy’s Savannah River Site, including the Savannah River National Laboratory, located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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