

**SAVANNAH RIVER OPERATIONS OFFICE****For Immediate Release****June 12, 2003****Media Contact:****Jim Giusti (803) 725-2889**

NNSA Official Recognize Rapid Completion Of Key Tritium Processing Components

AIKEN, S.C. (June 12)- Dr. Everet Beckner, Deputy Administrator for Defense Programs, of the National Nuclear Security Administration congratulated more than 200 craftsmen and other personnel who fabricated and installed the internals of the first two "gloveboxes" of the Site's new Tritium Extraction Facility, or TEF. This important work was accomplished three months ahead of schedule and 15 percent under budget.

Gloveboxes are large glass-enclosed and sealed cases that allow operators to manipulate controls and equipment from outside, thereby avoiding potential contact with radioactive or hazardous material. In this case, the gloveboxes are used in processes for purifying tritium, a radioactive form of hydrogen necessary for nuclear weapons to operate as designed. (Tritium decays rapidly and must be replaced in existing weapons from time to time.)

"These craftsmen are off to a tremendous start," Dr. Beckner said. "In addition, work on the remaining seven (7) gloveboxes is going well. I am pleased with all of the construction progress that I have seen today. I look forward to continued success from this project as it is a vital part of our Nation's defense".

TEF is part of NNSA's Commercial Light Water Reactor Program for manufacturing tritium. There has been no new source of tritium in the U.S. since 1988. This fall, Tritium Producing Burnable Absorber Rods will be loaded into a Tennessee Valley Authority nuclear power plant. After the normal 18 month fuel cycle is complete the rods will be transported to SRS, where the tritium is extracted.

Extraction is achieved by placing the rods into furnaces in the Remote Handling

Building to drive off tritium-containing gases. Those special gases are piped to the Tritium Processing Building where the gloveboxes are used for preliminary tritium purification and gas analysis work. Existing facilities then take over for final purification and loading.

TEF is more than 50 percent complete and scheduled to begin normal operations in 2007. The two gloveboxes were originally budgeted at \$ 1.4M. The cost for all nine was expected to be about \$12 million, out of the total budget for the project of \$506 million.

-NNSA-

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| [Back](#) |