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I hereby submit the following news article from the Augusta Chronicle to be included as part of the official comments on MOX draft EIS.

Tom Clements  
Greenpeace International

Augusta Chronicle (Augusta, Georgia)  
Sunday, March 16, 2003

MOX plant worries residents

Local minister brings experts to area

By Eric Williamson  
Staff Writer

AIKEN - Predominant winds from Savannah River Site are to the north, according to a recent government report, and that's what worries the Rev. Brendolyn Jenkins.

It means relatively poor towns such as New Ellenton would be the most affected over time if there were an airborne radioactive release at a mixed-oxide, or MOX, fuel plant proposed at the site.

But, depending on meteorology and other factors, all the communities within 50 miles of SRS, an area populated primarily by minorities and the poor, could be at risk from a plant accident.

The Rev. Jenkins calls such issues "the new civil rights."

SRS already handles tritium, a radioactive form of hydrogen used in nuclear warheads. If the proposed plant is built, it would take surplus plutonium, some of it from decommissioned warheads that will be disassembled, and blend it into the MOX fuel. The fuel would be shipped to nuclear power plants to be burned for commercial power.

SRS already has plutonium, and the volume it's storing is growing in anticipation of the MOX plant.

A recent report from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission delves into some of the environmental problems that could occur from plant construction and operation. The most dramatic scenario involves human exposure over a year's time to a hypothetical tritium release.

The draft version of the report, called an environmental impact statement, said at least 400 people would eventually die of cancer

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from the exposure.

While that number is expected to be revised downward in the final version of the report, minorities and the poor would still be affected the most.

Early exposures might come from inhalation, but long-term exposures would be mostly through ingestion of tainted crops, the report said.

New Ellenton Mayor Jim Sutherland works at SRS, but he said last week he had not received a copy of the environmental report. He also said he was not aware of any disaster plans that address a tritium release, but he said Aiken County's emergency planning officials are prepared for any number of disasters.

The Rev. Jenkins said she initially spoke in favor of the MOX plant at public meetings and still favors the jobs the plant would bring. But she said the new understanding that some classes could be affected more than others needs to be addressed.

"Though they say it's highly unlikely, we live in the land of 'What if?'" she said. "I would like to see the guarantees, if there could be any, and how they would address and eradicate that problem."

The Rev. Jenkins has been making the rounds, inviting community members to attend a meeting to be held Thursday at her church, Second Baptist in Aiken.

Speakers from Westinghouse Savannah River Co., the Energy Department and the Environmental Protection Agency will be present to answer questions from environmental and social justice groups and from the general public, she said.

The government will hold a meeting March 26 at the North Augusta Community Center to take public comments on the environmental impact statement. The Rev. Jenkins says she'll be there.

"I don't think we have the ability to stop this project," she said, "but as Christians we're called to be good stewards of the Earth."

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