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Sunday, Nov 03, 2002

# Local



Posted on Sun, Jun. 23, 2002

## Plutonium shipments top-secret

By CHUCK CRUMBO  
Staff Writer

The federal government's plans to haul weapons-grade plutonium to the Savannah River Site are so secret that even state police don't know what's happening.

"We're totally out of the picture on this one," state Department of Public Safety spokesman Sid Gaulden said Saturday.

Saturday was the first day the U.S. Department of Energy said it might start shipping 6.5 tons of the nuclear material to South Carolina from its Rocky Flats site near Denver.

But state officials said they didn't know if any shipments were made Saturday. All the DOE would say was that the plutonium was good to go.

Like a scene from a Hollywood thriller, the DOE plans to use ordinary-looking 18-wheelers to haul the material, suitable for making nuclear bombs.

The tip-off, though, might be an escort of trucks and vans loaded with heavily armed federal agents. Their job will be to thwart a terrorist attack.

One way S.C. authorities might know the plutonium has crossed the border is when the plutonium convoy passes a weigh station along a major highway or interstate.

Gaulden said the plutonium trucks won't stop. Instead, the lead vehicle in the escort will pull into the weigh station and notify officers the plutonium truck will be passing through.

"By that time, it would already be in the state," Gaulden said.

LeRoy Moore, of Colorado's Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center, said environmental activists used to watch for trucks leaving the Rocky Flats sites. They'd follow the trucks to make sure the nuclear material got to its destination safely.

But nothing like that is planned for these plutonium shipments.

"Nobody wants it," Moore said.

That includes Gov. Jim Hodges, who once vowed he'd lie down in the road to block plutonium shipments to SRS, which is near Aiken.

Hodges' efforts drew support and criticism Saturday from leaders of the Green Party from North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

"We oppose plutonium fuel and are dedicated to fighting any plans to force this dangerous poison onto our communities," said Tom Turnipseed,

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chairman of the S.C. Green Party.

Turnipseed said the group will recruit candidates for this fall's elections in hopes that their campaigns will focus voters' attention on the issue.

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