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SRS radioactive waste spills

Web posted Wednesday, June 12, 2002

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By **Preston Sparks**
Staff Writer

A blockage in a transfer line at Savannah River Site's Salt-stone facility Tuesday caused a 100-gallon spill of low-level radioactive waste mixed with a grout compound.

Dean Campbell, a spokesman for Westinghouse Savannah River Co., which operates SRS for the Department of Energy, said the spill occurred at about 11 a.m.

"There was no threat to the workers, the public nor the environment," he said.

Mr. Campbell said the transfer line was immediately stopped after the spill was noticed by workers. The cleanup was expected to be completed by Tuesday night. An investigation has opened to determine why the blockage occurred.

"At this point, we don't know why the line plugged," Mr. Campbell said.

As the waste backed up in the line, he said, it spilled onto the roof of the facility's housing building and the ground below. The housing building is where the waste is mixed with the grout compound.

Mr. Campbell said that at the Saltstone facility, which is at the center of SRS, low-level radioactive waste is fed into a building through a transfer line as another transfer line sends cement grout to be mixed with the waste.

The combination of grout and waste hardens and deteriorates over time, he said. Tuesday's blockage occurred at the point where the grout and waste mix together.

Mr. Campbell said it was the first spill he could recall at the Saltstone facility, which was built in the early 1990s. However, two spills from underground radioactive waste tanks occurred last year in a different area of SRS.

Reach Preston Sparks at (706) 828-3904.

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