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# Technology

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## Waste shipment faces long wait

Web posted Thursday, July 18, 2002

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By **Eric Williamson**  
South Carolina Bureau

AIKEN - Congress had its final say last week, but much more lies ahead before Savannah River Site can begin shipping its deadliest waste to the Yucca Mountain repository in Nevada.

The Department of Energy estimates it will have the underground storage tunnels ready by 2010.

In the eight years until then, DOE hopes legal challenges fail and its licensing process goes smoothly.

"There are five lawsuits filed by the state of Nevada alone trying to slow down the process," said DOE spokesman Joe Davis.

DOE officials have said it might be December 2004 before the department completes its application for permanent storage at Yucca Mountain.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission could then take up to four years to consider approval of the project - with numerous public meetings required along the way.

Opponents argue that the location, 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas, is unsuitable, but DOE says the deserted location and vast storage capacity make it the most sound place to house the materials.

Yucca Mountain is cleared to accept only 70,000 metric tons of nuclear waste. Of that amount, 7,000 metric tons will come from DOE reactors, and the rest would be commercial waste.

The department will lobby Congress in the upcoming years to approve more space, contending that Yucca Mountain can accommodate all of the nation's nuclear waste.

Aiken's 130,051 cubic meters of high-level waste will come from its Defense Waste Processing Facility. The worst 10 percent of the waste from Cold War weapons production is mixed with glass in a process called vitrification.

"Our waste tanks contain the periodic table, literally," said Dean Campbell, a spokesman for Westinghouse Savannah River Co.

He said the waste mixtures to be transported will contain large amounts of cesium and strontium, along with traces of plutonium and uranium that cannot be recovered.

Aiken is expected to be among the first sites to move its waste to Nevada, most likely transporting the waste by rail because of the size of the protective canisters involved.

The Senate voted 60-39 on July 9 to build the waste dump at Yucca Mountain, although the proposal had been on the table for years. House approval came in May.

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