

# New missions, workers vital for site

By Rob Pavey | Staff Writer

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Savannah River Site, which employed 25,000 workers as recently as 1993, has grown accustomed to a leaner work force that might never return to its Cold War prosperity.

The gradual decline of missions, combined with the impact of nonproliferation on a site created to produce material for nuclear weapons, has reduced its work force to 11,000.

Its immediate future depends on the cleanup of waste generated by a half-century of tritium and plutonium production -- and on new missions, such as the \$4.86 billion mixed oxide fuel facility that will bring 800 new jobs.

Jim Giusti, a U.S. Energy Department site spokesman, said activities such as liquid waste processing and the conversion of plutonium into commercial reactor fuel assures steady work for the coming decades.

"Our current production will take us out to 2030," he said. "But as far as what's in the future, I think you'll see our missions fluctuate a lot from now until then."

Even when cleanup projects are completed, there will still be jobs at the MOX plant and with ongoing tritium activities now consolidated at SRS, in addition to research within the Savannah River National Laboratory.

The site's changing role underscores the need to help bring new missions -- and new jobs -- to the area, said Rick McLeod, the executive director of the SRS Community Reuse Organization, an economic development consortium.

A recent study the organization commissioned concluded that almost 10,000 new jobs will emerge in the nuclear field during the coming decade, but not all of them will be at SRS.

Consultants spent four months evaluating data provided by the region's eight dominant nuclear employers: Southern Nuclear, Scana, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, the Department of Energy, Parsons, Savannah River Remediation, Shaw Areva and Shaw Construction.

Though SRS depends on new missions to add new jobs, it is also important to consider the aging work force at the site and the need to compensate for attrition, Mr. McLeod said.

"If you take into account attrition, there will be a need for lots of workers out there," he said. "Look at the age of the work force we have now. Most are in their 50s and getting closer to retirement age."

The need to replace older workers, coupled with the anticipated addition of nuclear reactors at Plant Vogtle and other plants, underscores the need to prepare younger students to take advantage of nuclear jobs, Mr. McLeod said.

"One of the things we are moving ahead with is a plan for hiring a program manager to help with the collaboration between industries, educational institutions and economic development interests," he said. "We've already met with K-12 superintendents in the area and are encouraging more dialogue."

The Community Reuse Organization hopes to develop a strategic plan to aid school systems in offering programs that will increase opportunities in nuclear fields for local students.

"It's like a stairway," Mr. McLeod said. "We're trying to go one step at a time up a stairway to reach our goals."

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