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By Porter Barron Jr.



League of Women Voters Shines Light on Nuclear S.C.

ack in 1997, when Mary Kelly, chemist and stalwart of the League of Women Voters of South Carolina, wrote her first report on the Palmetto State's nuclear affairs, states across the country were sending their low-level radioactive sludge to the nuke dump in Barnwell County, and residents of Columbia's low-income, predominantly black Edisto Court were speaking out against a nuclear-waste laundry that had quietly arrived in their neighborhood.

Kelly's watchdog report, published by the League, provided many South Carolinians with their first understanding of exactly what was happening behind the high fences and security checkpoints at the seven major facilities in one of the most nuclearized states in the nation.

The League recently issued a follow-up report — dedicated to Kelly, who died in November — which offers a new overview of nuclear activities in South Carolina. It also airs concerns about the transportation of nuclear waste, such as spent nuclear fuels from overseas destined for reprocessing at the U.S. Department of Energy's Savannah River Site; the protracted political battles over where to store mounting nuclear waste; and "dispelling the notion that reprocessing wastes would lessen the need for geologic storage," such as the abandoned subterranean facility at Yucca Mountain, Nev.

While the Barnwell facility closed its gates to out-of-state waste in 2008, except that coming from Connecticut and New Jersey, and Edisto Court banished the nuclearwaste laundry in 2003, Suzanne Rhodes, who authored the new report for the League, is quick to point out that South Carolina is still home to mountains of radioactive waste and those charged with securing and disposing of it are way behind schedule. Plus, the Barnwell dump has begun to leak cancer-causing

Rhodes tells Free Times that her main concerns for South Carolina as it relates to nuclear activity are the U.S. Congress not allocating enough funding for the Department of Energy to adhere to its Savannah River Site cleanup schedule and the possibility that Savannah River Site might pursue fuel-reprocessing deals with no plans to dispose of resulting waste, effectively establishing it as a new nuke dump.

The main mission at the Savannah River Site today is cleanup from the facility's years when it was known to its Aiken County neighbors as "the bomb plant." But lots of area residents, many tied to the nuclear industry, would like to see the site return to its lucrative days of making things instead

Nuclear Waste in South Carolina: An Issue Brief for Citizens

Read the full report at lwvsc.org/ files/nuclearwaste20140116.pdf

of cleaning up after itself. To appreciate how the disputes over the site's future have driven nuclear policy, one must realize that throughout much of its history, the Savannah River Site was South Carolina's largest employer, offering well-paid high-skilled jobs, drawing professionals from around the country, boosting the region's profile and its economy. In 1995, the site claimed 16,000

For Tom Clements, a long-time nuclear watchdog and policy expert based in Columbia, South Carolina's nuclear situation has deteriorated since Kelly's first report. As evidence, he points to numbers from a 2012 report by the U.S. Congressional Research Service showing that, when Kelly's report came out in 1997, South Carolina was home to approximately 2,100 metric tons of commercial spent fuel waste. As of today, he says, that number is closer to 4,300 metric tons.

"There's still no plan for disposal," Clements says. "The only thing that's changed is the waste has doubled." It