

News Savannah River Nuclear Solutions

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IdeasAmerica: Green Idea of the Year Award Finalist at SRS

AIKEN, S.C., September 28, 2020 – EM's Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) saved \$550,000 last year, thanks to an ingenious idea submitted by SRNS employees Susan Cornwell and Darren Gillis. IdeasAmerica judges were impressed and selected this highly cost-effective project as a finalist for the “Green Idea of the Year” award to be presented at the 2020 IdeasAmerica Annual Training Summit later this month.

Upon joining SRNS' Area Completion Projects group, after a career with the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), Cornwell studied the environmental cleanup technologies that had been used for over 30 years at the Savannah River Site (SRS). Cornwell, an Environmental Compliance Subject Matter Expert, working with Gillis, a Generator Certification Official, found dramatic decreases in the concentrations of groundwater contamination from degreasing solvents and some pesticides used at SRS during the Cold War.

“And, with that trend in mind, the idea formed to reevaluate all the hazardous waste that's generated from sampling the groundwater at SRS,” said Cornwell. “Not many people know this, but there are over 4,500 groundwater



After extensively studying the waste stream associated with groundwater sampling at the Savannah River Site (SRS), Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) Generator Certification Official Darren Gillis (left) and Environmental Compliance Subject Matter Expert Susan Cornwell determined that many of the 4,500 groundwater sampling wells at SRS no longer needed to be classified as hazardous according to DHEC regulations, which led to saving \$550,000 last year.

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monitoring wells out here that generate a large volume of purge water removed from each well prior to taking a groundwater sample. This can be over 50 gallons per well. This purge water, and anything coming in contact with it, must be treated as hazardous waste. That's a tremendous volume of waste to manage."

After an extensive study of the entire waste stream associated with groundwater sampling at SRS, Cornwell and Gillis determined that a large number of the wells no longer fell under the hazardous classification, according to DHEC regulations.

"That means the purge water from those wells no longer has to be managed as a hazardous waste. Thousands of gallons each year, as well as, the items that contacted that water, the piping, maintenance tools, protective clothing, well parts, pumps, decontamination materials and storage containers, can now be reused without requiring decontamination or be disposed of as nonhazardous," Cornwell explained.

The savings associated with a high percentage of wells reclassified through this process quickly and significantly added up. "This project saved \$550,000 last year and that savings will be there every year. In addition, the savings will only increase as we continue to designate more wells as being nonhazardous as time goes by," she added.

Cornwell stated that the reevaluation process had been a fun, team-based project. She and Gillis reached out to SRNS remedial project managers and engineering subject matter experts, to ensure all the collected data was verified prior to implementing this idea.

"I think it's also important to note that we were nominated for the Green Idea of the Year award for minimizing waste based on volume versus cost savings, though continually pursuing cost savings measures at SRNS is an important value for our company. And, with the IdeasAmerica program, you have to implement the idea, proving it's validity, in order to be considered for an award. We can thank Darren for carrying out the idea. We're a great team."

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor-led company with Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, is responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy's Savannah River Site, including the Savannah River National Laboratory, located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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