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For Immediate Release

## SRS student tour offers glimpse into nuclear materials management, nonproliferation

**AIKEN, S.C.** – (March 24, 2025) A group of students and faculty from South Carolina State University (SCSU) and Claflin University recently toured the Savannah River Site (SRS), receiving an in-depth look at L Area, a facility that is critical to nuclear materials management and nonproliferation missions at SRS.



*SRNS Operations Manager Tristan Downey, right, gives a tour of L Area to students and educators from South Carolina State University and Claflin University.*

Coordinated by SRS Education Outreach Programs, the visit offered students practical insights into nuclear fuel processing and the diverse operations at SRS.

“The visit centered around the safe management and handling of spent nuclear fuel,” said Kim Mitchell, SRNS Education Outreach Lead. “The significance of these educational tours goes beyond just explaining what we do— it emphasizes why we do it. These discussions help raise awareness among attendees and increase the likelihood of future engagement with SRS, as informed citizens, or part of the future workforce.”

Led by Operations Manager Tristan Downey, the tour offered visitors a detailed view of the repurposed reactor facility in L Area. Highlights included the storage of moderator used in nuclear reactors, the safe storage and processing of spent nuclear fuel, and the importance of underwater basin operations.

“Each facility has a unique function. L Area processes spent nuclear fuel shipped from foreign and domestic research reactors,” said Downey. “Since 1964, an estimated 47,000 fuel assemblies have been received and safely stored in L Basin. The students explored the operational side of the facility, learning about off-site fuel receipt, the disassembly basin, and the transfer of fuel to the H Canyon chemical separations facility at SRS for processing.”

One mission in L Area is to unload aluminum-clad uranium fuel into an underwater storage facility called the L Disassembly Basin. Assemblies are loaded underwater into specialized aluminum bundles. When ready for processing, the L Basin team removes the bundles and safely transports them by on-site rail to H Canyon.

Amonté Middleton, a junior nuclear engineering student from Orangeburg County, expressed her excitement and newfound appreciation for the operations at SRS. “The Site was intimidating at first

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because of its size, but the tour made me want to explore even more. Seeing how spent fuel is managed and processed was very impressive,” she said.



*South Carolina State University students were particularly interested in the legacy control panels found in L Area.*

Jayden Briggs, a junior civil engineering student from Florence, S.C., was particularly struck by the duality of the control room in L Area, where legacy equipment stands alongside operational panels. “I knew we were getting into serious business when I saw that SRS operated under the Department of Energy. The cautiousness required in the control room was eye-opening. The tour educated me on what SRS truly does and provided a strong sense of national security,” he commented.



*Visitors view a legacy reactor process room in L Area.*

Douglas Barnes, a career counselor from Claffin University, echoed the sentiments of the students. He emphasized the importance of safe nuclear fuel storage and its applications in research and medicine.

“I plan to share the insights gained from the tour with Claffin students, informing them about internships and entry-level positions at SRS,” he said. “I’m interested in future collaborations and ongoing visits to the Site to help students understand the diverse career opportunities available right here in our backyard.”

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The tour provided a unique educational opportunity for students to see the practical applications of their studies and the critical work being done at SRS. For more information about the L Area Disassembly Basin, click [here](#).

*Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor and HII partnership company, is responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy's Savannah River Site, located near Aiken, South Carolina.*

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