



Lab chief addresses need for new nuclear industry workers



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The Savannah River Site's aging workforce was addressed last week, as Site officials are looking for ways to find new workers to replace those who are retiring.

Terry Michalske, director of the Savannah River National Lab, spoke to the South Carolina Governor's Nuclear Advisory Council Thursday in Columbia. Michalske reported that he has been directed by DOE Secretary Ernest Moniz to assess



what the future looks like for the lab's "ability to maintain a nuclear science and technology component in this country."

Michalske said the primary need is to establish the proper academic programs so students can be both ready and willing to step into future positions at the lab.

"It's really important for us to get the students in early, to get interns, post-docs," said Michalske. "What happens is, once they get in here, they say, 'This is really challenging and interesting stuff.' But you wouldn't know that (because) it just doesn't seem that interesting."

Currently, the Savannah River National Lab employs more than 800 workers and undergoes regional, national and international missions including assisting other contractors with cleaning up SRS legacy waste and closing out liquid waste tanks.

The site's aging workforce has been a constant concern, according to reports released in December that within three years, up to 50 percent of the SRS environmental workforce will be eligible for retirement. Five months earlier, Carol Johnson, president of Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, said the average age of an SRS employee is 54, with a large portion of them eligible for retirement in the few years.

"Not all of them will go out the door at age 58, but there will be a fairly significant population that will. So we've got a big challenge ahead to fill those shoes," Johnson said in July.

One of the local initiatives to prepare students for employment is the Advanced Nuclear Skills Regionally program.



The program is funded by the Department of Energy and provides an annual stipend so the SRS Community Reuse Organization can continue bringing nuclear industry-related lessons to students. In May, DOE awarded \$994,000 to continue the program, which includes new college fields to fulfill workforce needs directly related to local and national missions.

This past year, the National Lab celebrated its 10th year as one of only 17 national labs on the country. The lab is owned by DOE and is run in part by Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, the Site's management and operations contractor.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

Derrek Asberry is the SRS beat reporter for the Aiken Standard and has been with the paper since June 2013. He is originally from Vidalia, Ga., and a graduate of Georgia Southern University. Follow him on Twitter @DerrekAsberry.

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