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SUMMIT AGREEMENT TO USE WEAPONS PLUTONIUM IN REACTORS IS A "NUCLEAR BLACK HOLE," NCI WARNS

An agreement that Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin will sign at the Moscow summit Wednesday clears the way for as much as 100 tons of U.S. and Russian weapons plutonium to be turned into fuel for civilian nuclear power reactors.

Paul Leventhal, president of the Nuclear Control Institute, issued the following statement:

"Today's announcement that the United States and Russia will cooperate to dispose of weapons plutonium is a welcome step toward nuclear disarmament, but the plan to turn most of it into fuel for nuclear power plants is sheer folly.

"The nuclear-terrorism risks of distributing plutonium fuel to reactors in Russia at a time of economic breakdown and political upheaval should be obvious. The cost will not be hundreds of millions of dollars, as currently estimated, but tens of billions of dollars tossed down a nuclear black hole because Russia's reactors will have to be refurbished and its nuclear industry fully subsidized to take on the task.

"The U.S. Energy Department's own studies show that directly disposing of weapons plutonium as waste would be much faster, cheaper and safer than using it as fuel in reactors. Although the agreement being signed by Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin gives lip service to the waste approach as a second option, it is clear from today's statements that the plutonium-fuel approach is the one favored by powerful nuclear interests in both nations. It is clearly in the public interest to avoid the risky business of fueling civilian reactors with weapons plutonium by promptly disposing of this most dangerous material as waste."

Background information on disposing of weapons plutonium can be found on NCI's web site at <http://www.nci.org/nci-wpu.htm>.



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