



NUCLEAR CONTROL
INSTITUTE
Washington, D.C.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, February 8, 2000

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**U.S.-RUSSIAN DEAL TO HALT REPROCESSING:
OVERDUE AND UNDERACHIEVING**

(Revised to reflect DOE Fact Sheet)

The Nuclear Control Institute today issued the following statement by NCI President Paul Leventhal on the U.S.-Russian collaboration to halt reprocessing of civilian nuclear fuel in Russia, which was announced by Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson on February 7:

Russia's apparent agreement to stop extracting plutonium from the fuel of its civilian nuclear power reactors is a major achievement for U.S. negotiators and mirrors what the United States decided to do with its own civilian spent nuclear fuel nearly 25 years ago. It is high time the Russians caught on, and their decision is a clear vindication of U.S. non-proliferation, anti-plutonium policies.

The United States now should follow up with a long overdue U.S. initiative to win a halt by the major plutonium producers--Britain, France, Germany and Japan--as well. Regrettably, the Department of Energy promptly announced that the U.S.-Russian initiative "is focused exclusively on Russia and is not intended to address civilian fuel cycle activities elsewhere....specifically...the use of plutonium in civilian nuclear programs in Western Europe and Japan."

Unless our European and Japanese allies join in a moratorium on extracting plutonium and using it as fuel, the U.S.-Russian plutonium initiative will have only limited impact. There will be some security benefit in Russia, but worldwide production of atom bomb material from civilian electricity-generating reactors will continue to grow. Spent fuel reprocessing in Europe and Japan has already produced more weapons-usable plutonium in civilian programs than the United States and Russia have produced for weapons.

Proliferating states like North Korea, Iraq, Iran, India and Pakistan point to these programs to justify their own acquisition of plutonium. Most of India's military plutonium, including the plutonium used in its 1974 and 1998 test explosions, was produced originally in civilian reactors.

Another big problem with the U.S.-Russian deal is that it is silent on current plans by both superpowers to use most of their surplus military plutonium from retired warheads as fuel in civilian nuclear power reactors. U.S. and Russian plans to introduce warhead plutonium into civilian reactors provide further encouragement for plutonium production and use in Europe and Japan and in the proliferating states.

A further problem is that while the Russians may now be willing to store their 30 tons of already reprocessed, civilian plutonium, they want to save it for a generation of so-called 'proliferation-resistant' reactors, not yet developed, rather than dispose of it with highly radioactive waste and get it out of harm's way.

It is still unclear what kind of research the United States is offering to sponsor in Russia as an inducement to halt further reprocessing of civilian nuclear fuel. Based on clearly stated Russian preferences, it could even include developing new plutonium-fueled, breeder-type reactors and designing a new generation of facilities for reprocessing the spent fuel Russia now seems willing to store for the time being.

This kind of deal does not put an end to plutonium use; it simply puts it off to another day.

The U.S.-Russian initiative on civilian reprocessing could be a major step forward, but without a similar move by the Europeans and Japanese, and without a moratorium on use of warhead and civilian plutonium as fuel, this initiative could prove to be a lot less than meets the eye.

NCI

For more information on plutonium and reprocessing issues, visit the NCI website at <http://www.nci.org>; also, a separate section on U.S.-Russian disposition of military plutonium at www.nci.org/nci-wpu.htm



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