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COALITION ANNOUNCES CAMPAIGN TO BLOCK COM ED'S PLANS TO USE WARHEAD PLUTONIUM IN ITS NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

CHICAGO, May 29, 1997 -- A newly-formed coalition of 19 national and Chicago-area public interest organizations announced plans today for a sustained campaign to block plans by Commonwealth Edison to manufacture surplus warhead plutonium into mixed oxide fuel (MOX) and to use this fuel in several of its nuclear power plants.

At a news conference here, leaders of the coalition said ComEd has failed to take into account "the unique hazards and costs" that the use of plutonium fuels entails. "ComEd does not realize and does not care about the special dangers posed by bomb-usable nuclear fuel," according to Paul Leventhal of the Washington, DC-based Nuclear Control Institute, which organized the coalition. Leventhal said ComEd is particularly unsuited to participate in a plutonium fuels program, given its "serious, long-standing operational and financial problems."

"The risk of an accident involving this extraordinarily dangerous material is very real; so is the potential for its theft," Leventhal said. "The citizens of Chicago and those communities where ComEd operates its nuclear power plants should demand that ComEd drop its plans to make fuel with plutonium."

The coalition called attention to ComEd's continuing problems with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), which has repeatedly criticized the company for mismanagement of its nuclear power plants -- including serious breaches of safety requirements. Using such strong terms as "dismal" and "disgusted" to characterize NRC's reaction to Com Ed's safety performance, the NRC has put six of the utility's 12 reactors on its "Watch List" and fined ComEd \$1,000,000 over the past 14 months. The coalition, joined by 36 grassroots organizations from around the nation, has written to [the Nuclear Regulatory Commission](#) and [the Department of Energy](#) asking the Federal Government to stop ComEd's plans to manufacture and use plutonium.

The coalition called ComEd's plutonium plans financially irresponsible as well. "ComEd's nuclear program has already resulted in a reported \$9.9 billion in so-called 'stranded costs' -- more than any other U.S. utility," Leventhal said. "ComEd should be extremely wary of entering into a major new program that will almost certainly increase operating and maintenance costs in unpredictable ways. ComEd is foolish to look to the Federal Government for a bail-out of a program of this sort. Far from being a money-maker, ComEd's planned use of MOX fuel could jeopardize the company's long-term position in a deregulated electricity market."

The organizations signing [the letter to ComEd](#) are: Committee to Bridge the Gap, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace International, Illinois Peace Action, Illinois Public Interest Research Group,

Military Production Network, Natural Resources Defense Council, North Suburban Peace Initiative, Nuclear Control Institute, Nuclear Energy Information Service, Nuclear Information and Resource Service, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Prairie Alliance, Public Citizen, Rocky Mountain Institute, Safe Energy Communication Council, Sierra Club, Simmissippi Alliance for the Environment, and U.S. Public Interest Research Group.



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