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Thursday, September 11, 1997

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STATEMENT OF PAUL LEVENTHAL **President, Nuclear Control Institute** **on the Shipment of MOX Fuel to Canada**

The Nuclear Control Institute, jointly with Greenpeace International and the Natural Resources Defense Council, has opposed the shipment of mixed-oxide ("MOX") fuel pellets to Canada for tests on using plutonium from dismantled nuclear warheads as fuel in civilian nuclear power reactors. We petitioned the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) in October 1996 and successfully blocked the first attempt by DOE to export MOX fuel to Canada.

Now this dangerous proposal is moving forward again. We applaud the leadership of the Canadian organizations opposed to the MOX shipments and hope their efforts meet with wide public support.

Although the proposed experiment would involve only a few kilograms of surplus plutonium, as much as 50 tons of highly toxic weapons-grade plutonium could eventually be made available by the United States and Russia for use in Canadian CANDU reactors.

This proposed export must be examined not simply as an isolated experiment involving a small amount of plutonium, but in the larger context of what to do with surplus U.S. and Russian weapons plutonium and how to stop the further spread of nuclear weapons. We are concerned that the United States is tilting prematurely toward the MOX option without fully exploring the alternative of disposing of all surplus military plutonium as waste deep in the earth.

There is a special danger in demonstrating the feasibility of using MOX fuel in CANDU reactors. CANDU reactors are operated in India, Pakistan, South Korea, Romania and Argentina, each of which have or have had an active program to develop nuclear weapons. China is about to buy two CANDU reactors. Non-Canadian CANDU operators can be expected to seize on this demonstration in Canada as a precedent to justify their own use of plutonium. The likely result is the further spread of weapons-usable plutonium in civilian nuclear power programs around the world.

Proposed security arrangements for the shipment appear to be inadequate. The draft environmental assessment prepared by the U.S. Department of Energy rejects the use of safe secure transport (SST) vehicles for the MOX export, despite recommendation by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences that mixed-oxide fuel must be accorded the same degree of security applied to nuclear weapons.

The proposed MOX experiments are not only dangerous but unnecessary. Ontario Hydro has announced that for safety and management reasons it will shut down the Bruce Station reactors it had offered for the full-scale use of MOX fuel. There is no point in demonstrating CANDU use of MOX fuel if the designated Canadian reactors are no longer available to use it. Both in Canada and the United States, it seems that the weakest utilities are the ones most anxious to use MOX fuel. Commonwealth Edison, a U.S. electric utility which has 6 of its 12 reactors on the Nuclear

Regulatory Commission's "Watch List" because of their dismal safety record, is heading up the lead consortium for MOX use in the United States.

According to DOE's own studies, weapons plutonium disposition can be carried out more quickly, more safely, and at less expense by means of "immobilization," a technology that combines plutonium with highly radioactive waste in glass form for direct disposal as waste in a geological repository. We urge both the U.S. and Canadian governments to reject the CANDU MOX scheme in favor of direct disposal of plutonium in glassified waste.

Further information can be found on the Nuclear Control Institute's web site at <http://www.nci.org/nci-wpu.htm>.



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