



# Nuclear Energy Information Service

*“Illinois’ Nuclear Power Watchdog for 25 years”*

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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **DOE GNEP Plans A Dangerous Leap Backwards, Citizens Group Warns**

**CHICAGO**—Plans by the U.S. Dept. of Energy (DOE) to resurrect the reprocessing of spent nuclear reactor fuel represent a dangerous policy leap backward according to nuclear watchdog organization Nuclear Energy Information Service. The plan – the **Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP)** – is the topic of a DOE hearing in Joliet, IL this evening. (**for location see Calendar at: [www.neis.org](http://www.neis.org)**)

“GNEP is a dangerous policy leap backwards for both radioactive waste disposal, and for nuclear proliferation concerns,” states David A. Kraft, director of NEIS, a Chicago nuclear power watchdog organization. “One could call it ‘Forward – Into the Past!’ and not be far off the mark,” Kraft says.

The DOE is conducting hearings around the country to determine the environmental suitability for sites that would host facilities designed to reprocess highly radioactive irradiated (“spent”) reactor fuel (HLRW) from commercial nuclear power plants. DOE has identified two sites in Illinois: one at the General Electric Morris Operation (GEMO) near Morris, Illinois, which currently stores nearly 750 tons of irradiated reactor fuel; and the other at Argonne National Laboratory.

“The GNEP proposal undoes over 25 years of work to develop plans for the deep-geological disposal of HLRW. At the same time it makes dangerous nuclear materials even more vulnerable to and available for terrorist use and diversion, while exposing the hypocrisy of US international policy on nuclear proliferation,” Kraft observes. “Don’t do as I do, do as I say’ is not a credible international nuclear policy position,” he says. “How can the US go to the negotiation table with countries like Iran and North Korea – and other future nuclear-wannabies – and ask them not to reprocess, when we are embarking on reprocessing ourselves? This is a thoroughly bankrupt position,” Kraft maintains.

Reprocessing of irradiated reactor fuel is a thrice-failed nuclear technology in the U.S. It was finally banned as a policy for dealing with HLRW by the only nuclear engineer the U.S. has ever had as President – President Jimmy Carter in the late 1970’s. Carter and his predecessor Gerald Ford both recognized that reprocessing had dangerous implications and ability to worsen nuclear proliferation of materials and weapons. Under his direction the U.S. embarked in the direction of deep-geological burial to permanently dispose of HLRW and the dangerous nuclear materials they contain.

“That the only nuclear engineer ever to be President recognized the proliferation threat reprocessing represents and subsequently banned it speaks volumes to the issue,” Kraft points out. “What more credible insight and expertise do the current Residents at the White House bring to the reprocessing issue in a post-9/11 world that could possibly contradict Carter’s insight and training?” Kraft questions.

Apparently experts at both the National Academy of Scientists (NAS -1996) and at MIT (2003) concur; and have gone on record stating that reprocessing brings no advantages to HLRW disposal; is inordinately expensive; and contributes to proliferation concerns.

While the GNEP plans ([www.gnep.gov](http://www.gnep.gov)) call for more “proliferation resistant” technologies than the previous concepts developed, that is only a relative statement. Members of the American Federation of Scientists point out that the new plans are by no means proliferation-**proof**, an important distinction often overlooked in the era of egregious

Washington news-spinning. They further criticize that, “As with most new programmes, the [GNEP is] big on vision and short on specifics.” (August 7 2006, *Nuclear Engineering International*; www.neimagazine.com). Kraft concurs: “GNEP is little more than a laudable set of goals backed up by little on-the-ground technology and lots of pie-in-the-sky new-tech promises – all costing up to \$200 billion whether they work or not. Reprocessing already failed three times in the U.S.; fool me once, shame on you. Fool me three times(!) and ask for \$200 billion for a fourth....come on now,” Kraft notes. “That money should be used for responsible, viable waste disposal schemes.”

Critics have also pointed out that reprocessing does not reduce the quantities of radioactive wastes, but merely changes the forms and types of the waste into liquids that again have to be re-solidified before they themselves can be disposed of. They also maintain that the rate at which reprocessing would consume nuclear weapons-usable materials would be far too slow to have any positive effect on the current international proliferation situation.

“But it would do the hardest work for terrorist organizations or nations with nuclear designs intent on getting nuclear materials, by separating those materials out of the irradiated fuel for easier acquisition,” Kraft points out. “This is terrible security policy.”

Local Illinois issues connected to the DOE’s GNEP plans are numerous, according to NEIS:

- Either of the considered sites is within 9 minutes flight time of the world’s busiest airport at O’Hare Field, a fact of great security significance in a post-9/11 world especially at a facility that would not be built with the same level of reinforcement and structural integrity seen with nuclear reactors – themselves of questionable survivability;
- Such a plan, coupled with another little known DOE proposal to obtain pre-emptive siting authority to mandate and site regional HLRW temporary storage facilities even over the objections of governors, catapults Illinois into contention to become the regional if not national de facto high-level radioactive waste temporary storage site; and often with the federal government “temporary” becomes “permanent”;
- Creation of either a reprocessing facility or designation as a regional/national HLRW storage site unleashes an enormous volume of truck and rail traffic onto already overburdened local and state highways and rail routes – creating a potential for the “mobile Chernobyl” type accidents predicted several years ago during the Yucca Mt. debate;
- Most emergency and first-responders in the areas under discussion are volunteers, lacking both the training and equipment needed to deal with severe radiological emergencies;
- Recalling a June, 2004 magnitude 4.5 earthquake whose epicenter was not far away from the existing GEMO site near Morris, seismic activity must be thoroughly examined; as should the GEMO site’s location on a flood plain of Illinois’ major river network;
- Previous pledges by the Illinois Department of Nuclear Safety to provide escort services for all shipments if HLRW into, through, or out of Illinois begs the question of who will pick up the tab for such escorts of the predicted enormous increase in HLRW shipments in Illinois.

“This is yet another nuclear program that fails both of its primary missions – even before it begins to operate. It is nuclear industry pork, not policy,” Kraft asserts.

“DOE needs to understand that Illinois is not a suitable site for such a facility; their presence is not wanted, and will be vigorously opposed. Better they should invest these funds into creating real solutions to the nation’s HLRW problem than wasting it on this egregious scam,” Kraft concludes.