



Statement by World Nongovernmental Organizations Opposing the Use of Plutonium (MOX) Fuel

We, the undersigned representatives of nongovernmental organizations around the world, call on the governments of the United States and Russia to forego the fabrication and use of plutonium (mixed oxide) fuel as a means to render surplus weapons plutonium unsuitable and unavailable for reuse in weapons, and demand that they pursue safer and more proliferation-resistant disposition methods.

We acknowledge that each country's declaration of roughly 50 metric tons of plutonium as surplus to military needs is a positive step toward worldwide nuclear disarmament and support the goal of preventing this plutonium from being diverted, stolen, or reused in weapons.

In an attempt to achieve this goal, the US and Russian governments have agreed to a plan to convert most of this plutonium into mixed oxide (MOX) plutonium fuel for use in commercial nuclear power reactors (mainly light water reactors) in both Russia and the United States and possibly Canada or other countries. Russia also plans to use weapons MOX in plutonium breeder reactors, which are capable of producing more plutonium than they consume (though during the life of the program they will operate the reactors in such a way as not to produce more plutonium).

We oppose the MOX plan for the following reasons:

- It would create a proliferation threat particularly while it is being transported to or stored at reactor sites, as the plutonium in fresh MOX fuel can be separated and used for weapons purposes.
- It would establish a MOX infrastructure, thus encouraging reprocessing of plutonium-bearing spent fuel both in the US and Russia. Reprocessing generates vast amounts of high level liquid radioactive waste and increases stockpiles of separated plutonium. (Russia has specifically stated that it would reprocess and re-extract the plutonium at the end of the disposition program.)
- It raises many unresolved technical and safety questions as weapons-grade plutonium has never been used as a fuel in commercial reactors. At minimum, it would complicate safe reactor operation and increase the consequences of a severe nuclear reactor accident.
- It is likely to take longer and cost more to dispose of plutonium using MOX compared to the current alternative, immobilization.
- It would not prevent plutonium from entering the environment. It would merely incorporate it into high-level radioactive waste.
- It would breach the barrier between civil and military nuclear activities and undermine global nonproliferation efforts.

We believe that immobilization is a far better option for plutonium disposition. It involves putting plutonium into a non-weapons usable form by mixing it with other materials and making the resultant waste form proliferation resistant, that is, resistant to theft and re-extraction by non-governmental parties or nuclear-capable states.

Under current US-Russian agreements, only the US will pursue immobilization and just for a portion of its surplus plutonium not deemed suitable for MOX. At this time, Russia is not planning on pursuing this option at all, and must be pressed by the international community to reverse its position.



We believe the full amount of plutonium declared surplus by each country should be immobilized and that research and development for immobilization, along with the necessary funding, should be increased to improve and further develop this technology. In the period before immobilization technologies are available, all plutonium should be stored securely and safely and placed under international safeguards.

Further, we believe that any plutonium disposition program must ensure public access to information including, but not limited to: adequate notification of decision timelines, information on program costs, knowledge of operating records of the various actors involved, detailed data on projected environmental impacts, and reliable data on safety and health risks. The public in the communities most directly affected in both countries should have ample opportunity for meaningful input into the decision-making process, including the right to intervene legally.

In both countries there should be sound independent oversight of the program and all aspects of the program should adhere to all relevant environmental or public process laws.

Therefore, we, as concerned colleagues across the globe who embrace efforts to reduce nuclear arms and safely dispose of surplus weapons plutonium, declare International Nix MOX Action Day, September 28, 2000. We pledge to expand a united international movement that will challenge every effort to develop, encourage, or use MOX fuel as a means of plutonium disposition, will work toward the goal of having all plutonium declared surplus, and vow to continue our efforts to ensure the isolation of plutonium from the environment.

Signed,

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