Reprocessing: A Bad Idea for South Carolina & Georgia

There is a long list of reason why reprocessing of radioactive spent fuel is a bad and costly idea which must not be pursued in South Carolina. Some of those reasons include:

1. Reprocessing would mean that the nation's radioactive spent fuel would be shipped to the reprocessing plant for storage and processing. A reprocessing plant is a large facility that could not be fed with just the spent fuel generated in South Carolina.

2. As we have seen at the Savannah River Site and Barnwell, waste which comes into the state is unlikely to leave. If reprocessing were to go forward, South Carolina would be at great risk of becoming the nation's spent fuel dump, the new Yucca Mountain.

3. Reprocessing produces a large number of deadly waste streams, including a huge volume of liquid high-level waste. As reprocessing involves dissolving spent fuel acid in hot nitric acid, the volume of waste is multiplied about 7 to 10 times and most of this waste would be stored near the reprocessing site. The 36 million gallons of high-level now stored in leaky tanks at the Savannah River Site, which conducted reprocessing to obtain plutonium for nuclear weapons, would look like child's play in comparison to what a commercial reprocessing plant would produce.

   Reprocessing produces a large volume of low-level waste and intermediate-level waste and also release radioactive gasses such as krypton into the environment once the spent fuel is broken open. This waste would likely be buried at SRS if chosen as a reprocessing site.

4. Reprocessing is <u>not</u> recycling. While plutonium and contaminated uranium are separated from reprocessing, only a very small percent of the plutonium is reused from the reprocessing plants in France, the UK, Russia and Japan. The uranium is contaminated and is very difficult to use and thousands of tons of this material are being stored for future disposal. All the nuclear waste streams that are produced by reprocessing can't be reused. Plutonium fuel (MOX) used in France is stored after being used only once and is not reprocessed.

5. Backers of reprocessing at SRS are already proposing it for a nuclear "energy park" at SRS. Given its high price tag, only a few special interests, including the French socialist company AREVA, would benefit and other cleaner industry would be driven away from investigating locating at SRS. An SRS energy park might include prototype "small modular reactors," to use plutonium that private backers want the tax payer to pay for.

6. Advocates of reprocessing aim to manipulate Secretary of Energy Chu's Blue Ribbon Commission as they would profit from a pro-reprocessing recommendation.

7. Reprocessing would be extremely costly and, lacking private funding, would be paid for by tax payers. DOE estimated in March 2009 that a reprocessing plant would cost more than $15 billion, likely a low figure as a new Japanese reprocessing plant, which hasn't been able to start after two years of trying, cost over $20 billion for the poorly designed plant alone.

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