



National Nuclear Security Administration

NEWS

NEWS MEDIA CONTACT:
Jim Giusti, 202/586-7317

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, July 12, 2001

United States Department of Energy and the Republic of Kazakhstan Ministry of Energy Mark the Completion of the Packaging of the BN-350 Fast Breeder Reactor Spent Fuel

At a ceremony in Aktau, Kazakhstan today, American and Kazakhstani officials marked the successful completion of a project to package spent fuel from a reactor that was originally designed to breed excess plutonium for new reactor fuel.

Officials from the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (DOE/NNSA), the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Embassy, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan (ROK) Ministry of Energy and Atomic Energy Committee, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) attended the event at the BN-350 fast breeder reactor.

In June 2001, the joint Kazakhstan-United States-IAEA team closed the 478th canister of spent fuel and placed it in the BN-350 pool under IAEA seal. This completed a two-and-a-half year, \$40-million project to condition and package nearly 3000 fuel assemblies, one of the largest such effort ever undertaken.

IAEA inspectors verified the fissile material content of each fuel assembly prior to its placement in the canisters. The Department of Energy's national laboratories developed and installed the neutron coincidence counters used by the inspectors.

Located on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea on the Mangyshlak Peninsula, the BN-350, was the first breeder reactor in the world with a large generating capacity. It was designed to generate up to 350 megawatts of electric power to supply steam for a desalinization plant, and to breed plutonium in excess of operating requirements to provide fuel for new reactor fuel, although it was never used for that purpose.

Kenneth E. Baker, Acting NNSA Deputy Administration for Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation said of today's ceremony, "The successful completion of this complex project is an example of how international cooperation can improve global security by reducing the risks posed by proliferation of fissile material."

(MORE)

NNSA-01-05

-2-

In 1996, the U.S. Department of Energy began a \$15-million program of physical security enhancements at the reactor facility in order to ensure the appropriate level of protection of the plutonium-rich assemblies at the BN-350. In 1997 the United States and Kazakhstan signed an agreement that established a joint program for the long-term, secure and safe disposition of the BN-350 spent fuel. The project is an important milestone in U.S. and Kazakhstani efforts to safely shutdown the reactor.

-NNSA-

NNSA-01-05