

DOE Home

Offices & Facilities

About DOE

Press Room

SEARCH

- [Highlights](#)
- [Press Releases](#)
- [Media Advisories](#)
- [Speeches](#)
- [Congressional Testimony](#)
- [DOE Digital Photo Archive](#)
- [Media Contacts](#)

September 13, 2004

Secret Mission to Recover Highly Enriched Uranium in Uzbekistan Successful

Fuel Returned to Secure Facility in Russia

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Eleven kilograms of enriched uranium fuel, including highly enriched uranium (HEU) that could be used for nuclear weapons, were safely returned to Russia from Uzbekistan in a secret mission conducted by the United States, Uzbekistan, and Russia, U.S. Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham announced today. The mission was completed September 9, 2004.

“The recovery, return and eventual elimination of this highly enriched uranium are an important milestone in our campaign to reduce this dangerous material worldwide,” Secretary Abraham said. “It was only with the strong cooperation of the Uzbeks and Russians that we were able to successfully complete this important international security mission.”

The highly enriched uranium was airlifted under guard from an airport near Tashkent, Uzbekistan to a secured facility in Dmitrovgrad, Russia. There, the uranium will be down-blended to low enriched uranium.

The nuclear fuel assemblies were originally supplied to Uzbekistan for use in the Russian-designed 10 megawatt VVR-SM multi-purpose research reactor, located near the Uzbekistan capital, Tashkent.

During the 1-day mission, approximately 11 kilograms of enriched uranium nuclear fuel, including HEU, were loaded into two specialized transportation containers provided by the Russian Federation. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards inspectors and U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) technical experts were present in Uzbekistan to monitor the process of loading the fuel into the canisters.

The facility in Russia that received the material has worked closely with the United States to implement security upgrades under the Bush Administration’s U.S.-Russian Material, Protection, Control and Accounting Program. Along with a decision to return the uranium to Russia, the Uzbekistan government also has made a decision to convert the VVR-SM research reactor to use low enriched uranium fuel, furthering our nuclear nonproliferation goals.

The mission was conducted under the Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI), [outlined by Secretary Abraham](#) before the International Atomic Energy Agency in May 2004.

On February 11, 2004, President Bush stated in a speech at the National Defense University that the greatest risk to the United States or anywhere else in the world is the possibility of a nuclear, radiological, chemical or biological terrorist attack. The U.S. Department of Energy has several ongoing efforts to combat this threat. In the latest step to increase effectiveness in preventing nuclear and radiological materials from falling into the hands of terrorists or other rogue actors, Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham announced the Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI).

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The mission of the GTRI is to remove and/or secure high-risk nuclear and radiological materials and equipment around the world that pose a threat to the United States and to the international community. This initiative will comprehensively address all vulnerable nuclear and radiological materials throughout the world and secure and/or remove these materials and equipment of concern as expeditiously as possible.

“The Bush Administration continues to take the lead in implementing nonproliferation programs to benefit the international community,” Secretary Abraham said. “I applaud the efforts of Uzbekistan for its cooperation with the United States, Russian Federation, and the IAEA under the Global Threat Reduction Initiative to reduce the threat of nuclear proliferation by returning HEU to Russia.”

“Our Administration has realized significant nonproliferation accomplishments including the breakup of the A.Q. Khan network and Libya’s decision to give-up its nuclear weapons program and work with us to remove its equipment,” Abraham said.

This is the fifth successful shipment of uranium being returned to Russia. In the past year, DOE has repatriated a total of 48 kg of HEU fuel to Russia from Romania, Bulgaria and Libya. And, in August 2002, 48 kg of Russian-origin HEU were repatriated from a research reactor near Belgrade, Serbia.

Next week, Abraham said the United States and Russia will be hosting more than 300 participants at the GTRI International Partners’ Conference. The International Partners’ Conference will focus international attention on efforts to secure vulnerable nuclear and radiological material that pose a threat to the international community.

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