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U.S. – Russia Agree To Open Doors To Closed Russian Nuclear Cities Allowing Shutdown Work To Begin on Russian Plutonium Production Reactors

Elimination of Plutonium Production In Russia Important Step In U.S.-Russia Nonproliferation Program

Washington, D.C. – In Moscow today, officials from the United States and Russia signed agreements that will allow access to the traditionally closed Russian nuclear cities of Seversk and Zheleznogorsk to begin the important work of shutting down the last weapons-grade plutonium production reactors in operation in the former Soviet Union. This agreement represents another major step in the U.S.-Russia Elimination of Weapons-Grade Plutonium Production Program (EWGPP) initiated by U.S. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham and Russian Minister of Atomic Energy Alexandr Rummyantsev.

Reaching agreements on access arrangements for the former secret cities of the Russian nuclear weapons complex is an important prerequisite to begin the work of replacing the nuclear reactors with coal-fired heat and electricity plants.

“Replacing these reactors with fossil fuel energy is critical to eliminate the production of weapons-grade plutonium in Russia and closing these facilities,” said Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham. “Russia and the United States have enjoyed a good relationship on this program and we look forward to continued progress.”

At a ceremony in Vienna in March 2003, Secretary Abraham and Minister Rummyantsev signed an agreement that would reduce the threat from weapons of mass destruction by stopping plutonium production at the last three Russian plutonium production reactors. As part of the agreement, the Department of Energy, working with its partners in Russia, will provide replacement fossil-fuel facilities to produce replacement energy for heat and electricity currently produced by the reactors and serving the two closed cities in Russia.

In May 2003, Abraham and the Russian Ambassador to the United States, Yuri Ushakov, announced that \$466 million to two U.S. companies to begin the shutdown work. Agreeing on access arrangements ensures that the work can stay on schedule and be completed with Russian and U.S. firms working together.

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The reactors, although originally designed to produce weapons-grade plutonium, also provide heat and electricity required by the surrounding communities in Siberia. The EWGPP program is providing fossil-fueled energy plants to supply such heat and electricity to the surrounding communities, facilitating the shut down of the reactors.

The three plutonium production reactors will continue to operate until the fossil-replacement plants are completed. These reactors have deficiencies in the areas of design, equipment, and materials, and are considered to be among the highest risk reactors in the world. To ensure reactor safety, high priority safety upgrades are being expeditiously pursued. The Department's Pacific Northwest National Lab will be responsible for necessary nuclear safety upgrades at both sites. These upgrades will not extend the life of the reactor facilities.

The Access Arrangements signed today govern the provision of fossil replacement plants. Access arrangements for the nuclear safety upgrades are being negotiated separately.

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