



SNAKE RIVER ALLIANCE

IDAHO'S NUCLEAR WATCHDOG & CLEAN ENERGY ADVOCATE

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Areva: A Risky Uranium Plan

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission issued the final environmental impact statement for the uranium enrichment plant French-owned Areva wants to build in eastern Idaho in February of 2011. In July, the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) held an evidentiary hearing on the license asking whether there was a need for a new supply of enriched uranium given the impact of the Fukushima nuclear disaster on global demand. The Alliance argued forcefully that the Fukushima crisis represents “changed circumstances” that were not accounted for in the Final EIS. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires a “supplemental EIS” in the instance of “changed circumstances.” **However, in October of 2011, the NRC ignored this argument and granted Areva a license for their ill-suited enrichment factory. Areva says they plan to start construction in the spring of 2012.**

What's Next? A license from the NRC is one step in a long process. We won't know for awhile whether this facility can be built or not. Areva is very financially unstable and recent news reports indicate all their future project investments are in flux. Areva CEO Luc Oursel told a French parliamentary hearing Wednesday that the troubled company is reviewing its financial and investment plans in light of a worldwide retrenchment in new plant orders and shutdowns of existing plants. Oursel said Areva would provide more details on investments his company might postpone in December. **It may be that the realities of the market will be Areva's downfall, in Idaho and elsewhere.**

The Alliance plans to appeal to the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board and directly to the Commissioners of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to reconsider licensing Areva in light of the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. At the least, we will insist on a response to the legally relevant argument that the events at Fukushima had a serious enough effect on the demand for new sources of enriched uranium to lead to a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. **Please help us in this effort by writing letters to the editor in local papers, and calling your elected officials to tell them that you don't want your tax-dollars going to support a French company to produce a dangerous and unnecessary product.**

No Need: Nuclear power impedes carbon reduction, since the substantial public and private capital that might go into nuclear power could no longer go toward faster, cheaper, less risky clean energy production, efficiency, and conservation.

- The Fukushima nuclear disaster has shaken the nuclear industry and essentially halted the much ballyhooed “nuclear renaissance.”
 - Japan and Germany—the world's third and fourth largest economies—are moving to new energy policies focused on clean renewable energy and increased energy efficiency and away from nuclear power.

- One of the most likely “new build” reactor projects in the US has lost its primary funder.

Radioactive Risk to Idaho: Areva proposes to build its uranium factory on the upstream end of the Snake River Aquifer a few miles east of the Idaho National Laboratory. INL’s nuclear activities have already contaminated the aquifer and have left substantial waste behind. Addressing these environmental challenges has already cost billions of taxpayer dollars and will continue for years.

- On average, producing *one ton* of uranium enriched enough for use in a nuclear power reactor creates *seven tons* of depleted uranium waste. The Department of Energy already stores more than three quarters of a million metric tons of depleted uranium.
 - Areva’s plant would produce 350,000 metric tons of depleted uranium over its operating life.
 - Areva plans to build an outdoor concrete storage plan large enough to hold all of its waste.
- No country that enriches uranium has figured out how to dispose of it. Even after the waste has been treated, disposal is both difficult and uncertain.
 - Unlike other nuclear waste, depleted uranium becomes *more* radioactive over the course of 1,000,000 years.
 - The US Nuclear Regulatory Commission has only recently begun to study whether near-surface disposal of significant quantities of depleted uranium could be safe or whether it should be disposed of in a deep geologic repository, a path favored by a number of independent experts.
 - All four current and pending shallow nuclear waste dumps in the US are only designed to contain the waste for a few hundred years, and the NRC has acknowledged that a whole new regulatory scheme has to be developed to guide disposal of waste that is dangerous for as long as depleted uranium is.

Financial Risk to US Taxpayers: Every project has an “opportunity cost,” which means that resources spent on it can’t be spent on anything else.

- Areva is owned by the French government. Though its 2006 world-wide sales topped \$14 billion, it is financially over-extended. It is building new-design reactors in Finland and France that are significantly over budget and behind schedule. It’s dramatically expanding uranium mining in Niger. Areva is deep into construction of a uranium enrichment factory in France. So to build its uranium factory in Idaho The DOE has announced its intention to give Areva this bail-out. If US taxpayers don’t cosign the loan, Areva has already said it will simply expand what it is already building in France.
- US taxpayers would get far more for our \$2 billion by investing in faster, cheaper, less risky clean energy production, efficiency, and conservation than in nuclear power.

Global proliferation risk: The Federation of American Scientists calls gas centrifuge uranium enrichment “an open road to a nuclear weapon.” That’s why the international community is so worried about Iran’s uranium enrichment plants even though indications so far are that Iran is not enriching uranium all the way to bomb grade. Any enrichment plant provides “breakout” capacity.

- A plant enriching uranium for a power reactor can be easily converted to enrich it for bombs.
- If the feedstock for an enrichment plant has already been enriched enough to use in a power reactor, more than half the work toward a bomb has already been done.
- Gas centrifuge plants are much harder to detect than plutonium reprocessors or older gaseous diffusion enrichment plants, the other two kinds of plants that make nuclear bomb ingredients. They don’t have to be massive, hard to hide facilities, nor do they use inordinate amounts of electricity or water that might alert the international community.