

Bush Budget Seeks to Recycle Spent Nuclear Fuel

It's taken 30 years to get over the disaster of Jimmy Carter and his licentious successor Bill Clinton.

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President George W. Bush on Monday asked the US Congress for \$250 million in research funds to restart a controversial program that would reprocess spent nuclear fuel.

The United States abandoned the technology in the 1970s because it was too expensive and there was fear terrorist groups or rogue nations could get access to the plutonium and make nuclear bombs.

However, the administration said it wants to phase-out the old recycling methods that separated plutonium from the spent fuel and created a nuclear proliferation risk.

Using new technology, the plutonium would "remain bound" with other highly radioactive materials, making it less useful for nuclear weapons and reducing security concerns, according to the administration.

The money for its so-called "Global Nuclear Energy Partnership" was included in the administration proposed budget for the 2007 spending year. The program would be part of the Energy Department.

Under the recycling program, the administration said the United States would partner with other countries to establish the infrastructure necessary to supply nuclear fuel to other nations.

The White House said its plan "will help meet the growing demand for electricity in the developing world through an international framework that will promote emissions-free, safe nuclear energy and eliminate the need for foreign countries to build enrichment recycling capabilities."

The United States and the European Union are concerned that Iran's plan to enrich uranium could result in its development of nuclear weapons. Iran denies this, saying it wants the uranium to fuel nuclear power plants.

The administration said its recycling plan would also reduce the thousands of tons of nuclear waste sitting at US nuclear power plants and encourage the building of more reactors to expand domestic electricity supplies.

The amount of commercial spent nuclear fuel destined for disposal at the Yucca Mountain storage site near Las Vegas would be reduced by 80 percent under the program, the White House said.

Reprocessing separates uranium and plutonium from spent fuel so the elements could be used further.

Twelve of the 33 nations that generate electricity from nuclear power plants practice reprocessing, but it has not been done in the United States for more than 20 years, according to the Nuclear Energy Institute trade group.

President Jimmy Carter banned reprocessing because of concerns it could spread nuclear weapons. President Ronald Reagan lifted the ban and President Bill Clinton reinstated it.