

## **Nuclear Bomb Grade Fuel Removed From Uzbekistan**

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United Nations Press Release  
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Spent nuclear fuel containing enough uranium to produce two and a half nuclear bombs has been returned to Russia from Uzbekistan in a secret mission completed yesterday under monitoring by the United Nations atomic watchdog agency as part of its efforts to stop the diversion of such material to terrorist or other ends.

"There was particular concern about the Uzbek spent fuel given its significant quantity and that it was no longer 'self protecting'," the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Crosscutting Co-ordinator for Research Reactors, Pablo Adelfang, said.

"This means that the fuel has lost its high radioactivity. In other words, it would no longer injure anyone who handled it and would not deter potential thieves," he added of the operation, a joint undertaking of the IAEA, the United States, Uzbekistan, Russia and Kazakhstan as part of the Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI). GTRI seeks to identify, secure and recover high-risk vulnerable nuclear and radiological materials around the world. It is the first time that fuel used in a nuclear research reactor – called spent – has been repatriated to Russia from a former Soviet state, although 11 kilos of fresh highly enriched uranium was sent back from the same reactor in 2004.

The 63 kilograms of spent highly enriched uranium (HEU) was transported to Mayak in Russia in four separate shipments under the secret operation, which was six years in the planning. IAEA safeguards inspectors monitored and verified the packing of the fuel for transport over the course of 16 days.

"The shipment is an important step to reduce stockpiles of high-risk, vulnerable nuclear materials," Mr. Adelfang said. "Russia, the US, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan should be applauded for their successful cooperation. It will contribute to the security of both Uzbekistan and the international community."

In Russia, the fuel will be processed so that it can not be used for atomic bombs. Russia originally supplied the fuel for use in the 10 megawatt research reactor. Located at the Institute of Nuclear Physics of Uzbekistan, 30 kilometres from Tashkent, the capital, the reactor is currently used for research and to produce isotopes for medical purposes.

The IAEA is now helping to convert the reactor to run on fuel that can not be used to make a nuclear weapon. The Agency is also developing lessons learned from this shipment to provide a basis for guidelines for future spent fuel shipments.

Over the past three years the IAEA has supported similar operations in other countries including Libya, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Bulgaria, Latvia and the Czech Republic to transfer HEU reactor fuel back to its country of origin.