MIT Will Direct New Nuclear Energy Lab

If you can't say anything good about a piece of news, don't say anything.

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MIT is leading a group of universities and companies in a new nuclear energy laboratory whose goal will be to develop a next-generation nuclear power plant.

The Idaho National Laboratory, a combination of the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory and Argonne National Laboratory West, will give MIT's Department of Nuclear Engineering more funding from the US Department of Energy, said David Moncton, director of the MIT Nuclear Reactor Laboratory.

Currently, the MIT reactor is involved in testing new fuels and materials for a next-generation power plant. Many graduate students are already involved in this research, and this number will increase with the new funding for the Nuclear Engineering Department. There will also be opportunities for students to go to Idaho to perform experiments not possible here, said Moncton.

Students would be working with the Advanced Test Reactor in Idaho, a more powerful reactor than the one at MIT. The mission of the Idaho National Laboratory is to develop a prototype reactor to carry the future of nuclear power and hydrogen production, Moncton said.

Hydrogen production, which is needed to move to a fuel-cell economy, is a good complement for nuclear power because of the high temperatures and electricity needed. The MIT Nuclear Reactor will play a significant role in the research of the laboratory. Smaller-scale experiments needed to develop the next generation power plant will take place in the MIT reactor rather than in the larger one in Idaho, said Edward S. Lau, Superintendent of Reactor Operations. MIT is the only university in the consortium to have a working test reactor.

The other universities in the consortium include the University of New Mexico, North Carolina State, Ohio State University, Oregon State University, and a regional collaboration of the major Idaho universities (the University of Idaho, Idaho State University, and Boise State University). Each of these schools has a strong nuclear engineering department and acts as a center in their own region.

The idea is to establish a network of universities interested in participating in the next generation nuclear power plant; but the network will not be exclusively these five, said