

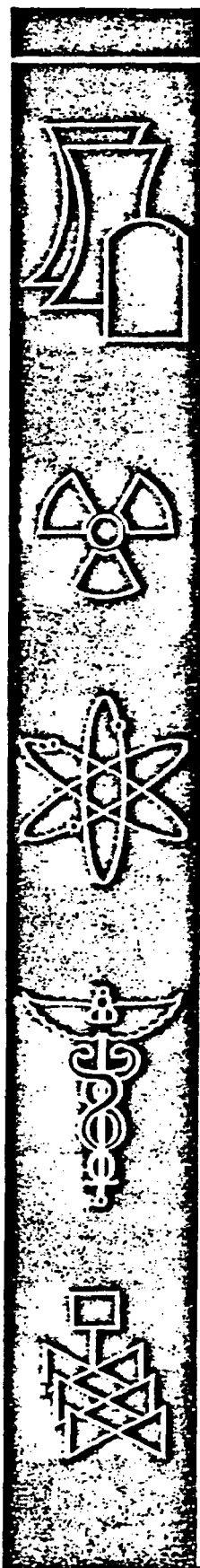
Exhibit 1

Proceedings of the Nuclear Safety Research Conference

Held at
Marriott Hotel at Metro Center
Washington, DC
October 22-24, 2001

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research

Proceedings prepared by
Brookhaven National Laboratory



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Held at
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S. Nesmith, NRC Project Manager

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ABSTRACT

This report contains papers at the Nuclear Safety Research Conference at the Marriott at Metro Center Hotel in Washington, DC., October 22-24, 2001. The papers for the Plenary Sessions are included first, followed by the papers presented in each of the five breakout sessions conducted over the course of the three days. They describe progress and results of programs in nuclear safety research conducted in this country and abroad. Foreign participation in the meeting included papers presented by researchers from Finland, France, Japan, and Russia.

The titles of the papers and the names of the authors have been updated and may differ from those that appeared in the final program of the meeting.

An asterisk (*) in lieu of a page number indicates the transcript of remarks or the final paper was not available in time to be included herein.

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
NUCLEAR SAFETY RESEARCH CONFERENCE
OCTOBER 22-24, 2001**

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Need for Experimental Programmes on LOCA Issues Using High Burn-Up and MOX Fuels

Alain MAILLIAT, Michel. SCHWARZ

**Institut de Protection et de Sûreté Nucléaire
Département de Recherches en Sécurité
C.E.. Cadarache, France**

Safety studies performed in IPSN and elsewhere pointed out that high burn up might induce significant effects, especially those related with fuel relocation during LOCA situations. Uncertainties exist regarding how much the existing safety margins associated with peak clad temperature, clad oxidation, core coolability, clad residual ductility can be reduced by new fuels like the MOX one, burn up increases, the arrival of various alloys for fuel rod cladding. A better knowledge of specific phenomena associated to fuel effects is required in order to estimate the new margins and to resolve the pending uncertainties related to the LOCA criteria. Therefore, in addition to the programmes currently planned in the Halden reactor, IPSN is preparing the so-called "APRP-Irradié" (High Burn up fuel LOCA) programme. One of the important aspects of this programme is In-Pile experiments involving bundle geometries in the PHEBUS facility located at Cadarache, France.

1. INTRODUCTION

In France and in other countries, a permanent evolution of the light water reactors (LWR) is observed since the seventies. The evolution deals with the reactor designs (900 MWe/3 loops, 1300MWe/4 loops, N4, future EPR). It is also related to the fuel management and burnup increase (3 cycles, 4 cycles, 39¹ GWd/tU, 47, 52, 60 GWd/tU in the next future). This evolution affects the fuel itself (UO₂, MOX, Gd fuel), the cladding (Zircaloy, Zirlo, M5) and the control rods (Ag-In-Cd, B₄C). As a consequence of these modifications, there is a permanent need to reassess the reactor safety studies which implies improving the associated knowledge and upgrading the corresponding calculation tools. Such a need is not specific to the French situation. For the studies associated with the continuous evolution of the reactor operation, the safety authorities requirements are both related to the design basis accidents and the severe accidents. They have to appreciate to which extent their analyses and criteria might be modified by the burnup increase and the type of fuel. In France, under safety considerations, it was requested prior to any generic authorisation of discharge burn-up extension, that the high burn-up fuel behaviour be validated, with the support of appropriate R&D tests results, under accidental conditions, particularly under Loss-of-Coolant-Accident (LOCA) conditions.

The current regulatory safety criteria for LOCA, still in use in most countries, are derived from the ECCS acceptance criteria that were issued by USAEC in December 1973 and published in the Code of Federal Regulations (10.CFR50, part 50.46) as "Acceptance Criteria for Emergency Core Cooling Systems for Light-Water-Cooled-Nuclear Power Reactors".

The criteria are stated as 5 requirements, concerning the calculated performance of the cooling system under the most severe loss-of-coolant accident conditions. A summary of these conditions is given on the figure 1 against. These first two requirements address: the peak cladding temperature (PCT) which shall not exceed 1204°C and the maximum cladding oxidation rate, defined through an equivalent cladding reacted (ECR), which shall nowhere exceed 17% of the cladding thickness before oxidation but after cladding swelling with or without rupture.

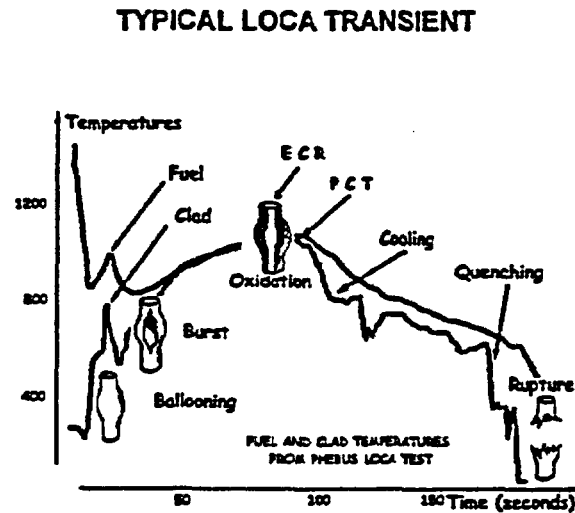


Figure 1

¹ Mean value per assembly

The third request addresses the maximum hydrogen generation, the total amount of which shall not exceed 1% of the hypothetical amount generated by the reaction of all the metal in the cladding surrounding fuel. Finally the last two requirements are related with core cooling. The calculated changes in core geometry shall leave the core amenable to cooling and after any operation of the ECCS, the core temperature shall be maintained at an acceptably low value and decay heat removed for the extended period of time required by long-lived radioactivity.

2. UNCERTAINTIES AND PENDING ISSUES

In the aftermath of the AEC LOCA criteria release, numerous studies were undertaken worldwide in order to improve the basic knowledge of the physical phenomena intervening in LOCA transients, so as to allow a better prediction with realistic models. Beyond the numerous experimental investigations that were conducted on unirradiated rods or cladding, either in-pile or out-of-pile, there exists a few number of available results of such experiments with irradiated material. Following is a very short review of the current knowledge on clad and fuel rod behaviour gained from experiments on irradiated material, that will introduce the pending questions and critical issues for irradiated fuel behaviour in LOCA.

2.1 UNCERTAINTIES

2.1.1 CLAD BEHAVIOUR

An important progress in knowledge relative to irradiated clad behaviour has been obtained from the results of the French EDF/IPSN [1,2] program (TAGCIR and HYDRAZIR tests), addressing the oxidation kinetics and quench bearing capability of irradiated zircaloy. The main outcome concern:

- the protective effect of corrosion oxide scale;
- the oxidation kinetics of irradiated zircaloy;
- the resistance to quench loads of irradiated zircaloy;
- the effect of high hydrogen content, as a result of internal hydriding during LOCA transient.

Relative to oxidation kinetics and quench behaviour, a comprehensive understanding of all involved phenomena and of their inter-related influences is not yet achieved and leaves still pending questions, most of them being not specific to high BU fuel. One important question is the influence on clad quenching resistance of axial constraints that may result from differential contractions upon quench between guide tubes and a fuel rod blocked in spacer grids as a result of ballooning or metallurgical interaction. Such blockage consequences had been evidenced on past tests at JAERI [3] on unirradiated rods and should therefore be expected to some extent on irradiated rods.

2.1.2 ROD BEHAVIOUR

There exists a few number of available results from experiments with irradiated fuel rods under LOCA conditions. The main outcome were found in results from the PBF-LOC tests[4,5] in the USA, the FR2 tests[6] in Germany, and the FLASH5 test[7] in France. They concern the fuel relocation process and an increased cladding deformation.

FUEL RELOCATION

All the available tests performed with irradiated fuel rods experiencing LOCA conditions have shown an accumulation of fuel debris in the swollen region –called balloon- of the burst cladding which resulted from fuel fragments slumping from upper locations (see figures 2 and 3 below from FR2 results).

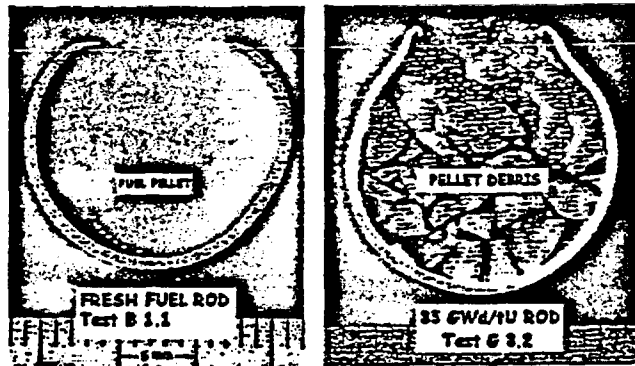


Figure 2

This process, here after called fuel relocation, is initiated at the time of the cladding burst, as demonstrated by the FR2-E3 and E4 tests. It is thought that the driving forces are both gravity and the pressure difference between the rod upper plenum and the channel.

This fuel relocation is not counteracted by the fuel-clad tight bounding, which exists with high burnup fuel.

Indeed, the process was observed in the FLASH-5 test with 50GWd/t fuel in spite of a rather low clad strain (not higher than 16%). It is thought that the cladding temperature increase combined with its ballooning suppress –at less partly- the bounding making possible the fuel relocation.

Finally, fuel relocation process is not specific of high burnup fuel. It was also observed for fuel rod having a burnup as low as 48MWd/t (LOC5-7B test).

AN INCREASED CLADDING DEFORMATION

In PBF-LOC experiments 2 couples of rods (2 unirradiated + 2 irradiated) were simultaneously tested in the same test train. Available data for comparison, although in very limited number due to technical problems, clearly indicate significant differences in the deformation behaviour of irradiated versus unirradiated rods.

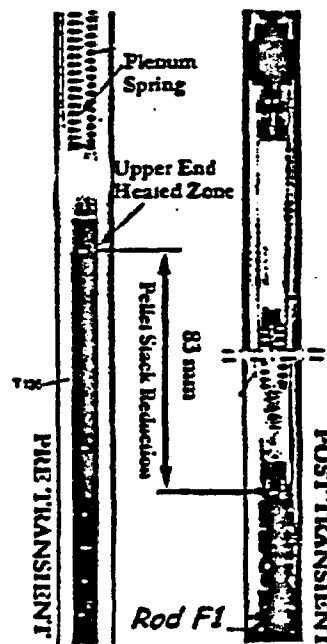


Figure 3

- A higher circumferential rupture strain for irradiated rods (a factor greater than 2 relatively to unirradiated rod strain for maximum values) and more axially extended;
- A wall thinning affecting almost all the circumference of irradiated rods, thus indicating low azimuthal temperature differences as compared to unirradiated rods.

These differences in behaviour have been attributed to the lower temperature differences on the clad of irradiated rods, circumferentially and axially, as a result of the pellet-clad gap reduction due to clad creepdown during rod irradiation.

2.2 THE PENDING ISSUES

A better understanding of the specific phenomena shortly mentioned above leads to raise a list of some complementary questions related with rod behaviour, fuel relocation process and coolability issue during LOCA transients.

2.2.1 ROD BEHAVIOUR

The question mark about rod behaviour is related with the influence of hydrogen pick-up and other irradiation effects on ballooning, burst behaviour and embrittlement during reflooding which were not considered when 10CFR50, part 50.46 was released.

2.2.2 FUEL RELOCATION

Several questions are induced by the relocation process. The first ones concern the process itself. The needed data are the following ones.

- Instant of fuel movement at high burn-up, with possible delay due to fuel-clad bonding.
- Filling ratio of clad balloon at high burn-up, with fragmentation of UO₂ rim or MOX clusters
- Impact of the relocated material on steam access inside the balloon and hydrogen uptake rate.

The second set of question marks concerns the consequences of the relocation process.

- Which are the effects on peak clad temperature and final oxidation ratio of the local increase in lineic and surfacic powers and of the local decrease in fuel-clad gap resulting from fuel accumulation?

Note that these last issues are particularly important for end-of-life MOX fuel for which power generation is not reduced, unlike for UO₂ fuel.

2.2.3 COOLABILITY

Related questions should be considered additionally, relative to flow blockage behaviour of highly deformed cladding with possibly relocated fuel and the embrittlement potentials associated to fuel fragmentation. The 90% value for flow blockage still coolable, as derived from results of flooding experiments (FEBA, SEFLEX et al) on unirradiated rods arrays is questionable since these experiments did not take account of any fuel relocation and associated effects. The needed information are the following.

- What is the maximum flow blockage ratio that leaves coolable an irradiated rods bundle?
- Does the maximum flow blockage ratio attainable with an irradiated rods array remain below the maximum coolable value indicated above?

There is presently a complete lack of data allowing to answer these questions.

- what flow blockage configuration would be worst coolable with occurrence of fuel relocation?

In other words, is the coplanar flow blockage still the worst coolable case?

3. THE IPSN APRP IRRADIÉ PROJECT

For many years, IPSN and several other safety organisations have applied a three-tier method for their reactor safety researches. The first step consists of computer code developments from the existing data bases. The second step involves small-scale, out-of-pile experiments, which provide the additional data bases requested by the code developments and their preliminary assessments. But, as the reactor phenomenology cannot be totally reproduced in such small scale experiments, a third step consisting of integral in-pile experiments using real materials is essential for comprehensive accident analyses. Their results allow the final code assessment in terms of reactor applicability and simulation completeness. This in-pile part of a programme assures that the investments done for code developments and small scale experiments will produce profits in terms of reactor safety. This three-tier method is applied by IPSN for the various research programmes devoted to reactor safety, design basis accidents including RIA and severe accidents programmes.

Regarding the LOCA issue, the current testing programmes dealing with irradiated material only involve out-of-pile experiments : separate effect quench tests on irradiated cladding (TAGCIR tests) in France; tests on irradiated cladding and integral type experiments (ballooning / burst / oxidation / quench) on irradiated rods at ANL (USA) [8] and JAERI (Japan) [9] with the support of an important programme of mechanical tests. In addition, OECD has planned an in-pile programme consisting of some single rod geometry tests with irradiated fuel. The programme should be conducted in the Halden reactor and should provide information about the relocated fuel characteristics.

But these programmes will not solve all the previously mentioned uncertainties because these ones are mainly associated with the combined behaviour of fuel and cladding under representative conditions of the reactor evolution during the LOCA transient. Based on the long fruitful experiences of a three-tier method, the so called *APRP Irradié* programme, providing the in-pile experiments third tier, should provide the missing part of the data bases required for code assessments in terms of reactor applicability and simulation completeness. This programme is prepared in a coherent way with the present international efforts in order to validate, and possibly update, the results obtained from separate effects tests and previous limited in-pile tests.

3.1 THE MAIN EXPERIMENTAL OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the in-pile experiments will be to investigate the behaviour of fuel and cladding with conditions representative of the reactor during LOCA sequences. The main factors that will be accounted for are:

- the nature of fuel (UO₂, MOX, Burn-up),
- the fuel-clad thermomechanical coupling (i.e. fuel relocation)
- thermal azimuthal gradients (main factor affecting cladding strain and blockage ratio)
- thermal-hydraulic aspects (i.e. quenching, coolability of blocked arrays)
-

3.2 TEST DEFINITION RATIONALE

The following analysis provides the rationale for the *APRP-Irradié* programme characteristics. It is shown that the conditions for having representative data for reactor applications are both in-pile tests and bundle geometry.

3.2.1 NEEDS FOR IN-PILE TESTS

The in-pile test need results from three reasons.

Neutron flux provides the unique way to produce the correct heat generation in the fuel fragments, corresponding to the residual power, whatever are the relocations induced by the ballooning and/or the burst of the rod. Both the exact amount of heat generation in the balloon and the heat exchanges with the rod channel depend on the characteristics of the relocated fuel fragments, their size, shapes, and compaction ratio. This heat generation correctness is one of the main conditions for having realistic estimates of the relocation consequences in terms of equivalent clad reacted, peak clad temperature and hydrogen uptake inside the balloon. All

these aspects impact the strength of the rod during the quenching phase and the residual ductility of the rod after the LOCA transient.

During the blowdown phase of the LOCA transient, there is much less heat generation in the fuel and the clad coolant heat transfer is drastically reduced. Therefore, the fuel-stored energy is redistributed in the pellet and the cladding. Simultaneously, within a few seconds, this redistribution produces a decrease of the pellet center-line temperature from 1500°C down to, say, 1000°C and an increase of both the pellet rim and clad temperatures from 300°C up to 1000°C. Due to these temperature transients, the central part of the pellet will experience a contraction while the rim and the clad will undergo an expansion. Fuel mechanical stresses and fragmentation could be induced by these adverse effects. It has to be kept in mind that during usual experiments, for which a blowdown phase is not reproduced, clad and fuel temperatures are simultaneously increased or decreased without producing any comparable thermomechanical transient. In-pile tests including a blowdown phase provide the way to get a definitive answer regarding the additional fuel fragmentation prior to the relocation and how much this refragmentation process affects the amount and the characteristics of the relocated fuel.

Finally, during reflooding and quench process studies, in-pile tests allow to maintain the heat generation in the fuel corresponding to the residual power. By this way, more representative conditions of the thermomechanical loads of the rods are provided. Without such a power during the reflooding phase, steam production and cladding oxidation are reduced; the temperature transients experienced by the rods are less severe. Consequently, under estimates of core embrittlement during reflooding could be obtained.

3.2.2 NEEDS FOR BUNDLE GEOMETRY

In addition to the requirement associated to heat generation mentioned above, bundle geometry is a second important condition to produce realistic data. Relocation being closely associated with the volume which is made free by the rod burst, it is clear that a correct amount of relocated fuel will be produced only if the sizes of the balloons are representative of the reactor conditions. Such balloon sizes can be obtained –as explained below– only with bundle geometry. This is the reason why these tests are essential and complementary of single rod tests.

During the early stage of the LOCA transient the fuel rods experience the ballooning and burst processes. For such phenomena, bundle geometry is a necessity to get a correct azimuthal temperature field around the fuel rods since this field is crucial to produce a realistic balloon size. An illustration of the impact of the azimuthal temperature field on the stain at burst is given by the results of single rod tests with heated or non-shroud. A uniformly heated shroud reduces the azimuthal temperature variation around the rod. For such tests a higher rod deformation is obtained. Conversely, an unheated shroud tends to increase the azimuthal gradient and, therefore, leads to small rod deformation at strain (see figure 4 below).

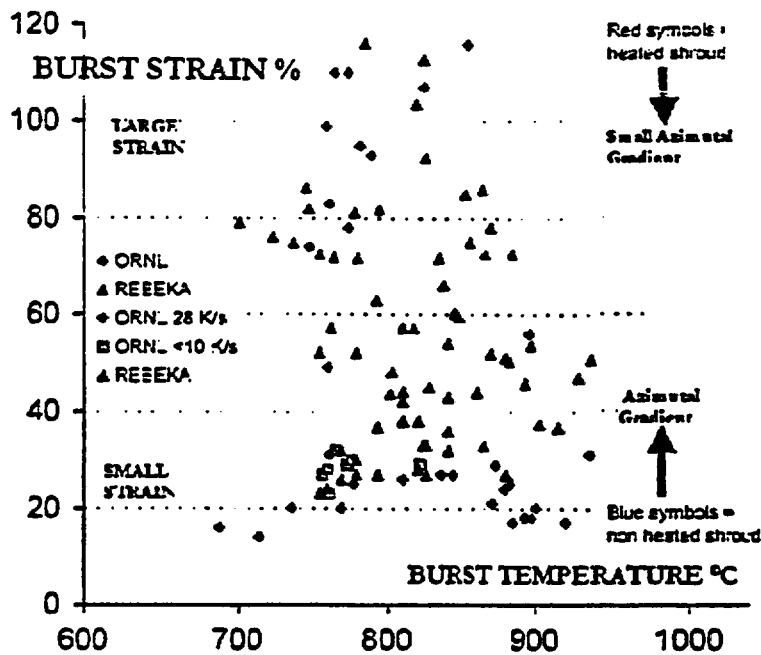


Figure 4

Additional reason for a bundle are the radial interactions between adjacent fuel rods that need to be taken into account because they modify the size and shape of the balloons. Such kind of balloon interactions are clearly illustrated with the side picture (figure 5) from PHEBUS LOCA test 215. Having in mind that the amount of relocated fuel is associated with the size and the shape of the balloon, the picture demonstrates that realistic data will require bundle geometry. This bundle geometry requirement to ensure representative mechanical interactions with neighbour rods was stated in early 80ies – several years ago- in consideration of ORNL MRBT B5/B3 experiments [10].

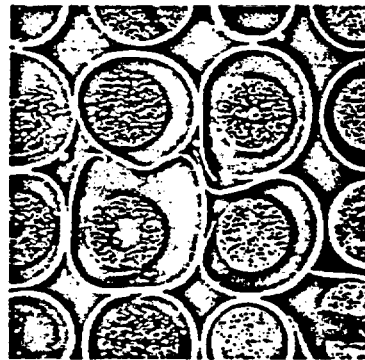


Figure 5

During core reflooding, a bundle is an obvious requirement for reproducing, on one hand, the correct flow blockage induced by the ballooning of the rods and their radial interactions and, on the other hand, the excess of heat generation at the blockage location due to the fuel fragments relocated in the balloons.

Finally, such bundle geometry is also necessary to represent the axial and radial stresses induced by the grids and the adjacent rods, which might restrain the rod contraction during quenching.

3.3 EXPERIMENTAL CONFIGURATIONS

Since it is hardly conceivable to carry out one type of experiments that will address all pending questions with any chance to provide some usable results, it appears more appropriate to perform two kinds of in-pile experiments, namely separate effects tests and integral tests.

3.3.1 SEPARATE EFFECTS TESTS

The objectives of these tests are to address phenomenological aspects, in order to confirm or correct and extend the previous results relative to:

- rod deformation,
- fuel relocation,
- the resulting resistance to thermal shock loads, with or without effect of clad axial constraining.

These tests should be realised with one irradiated rod within a ring of 8 fresh fuel rods, which will provide a representative thermal environment in order to ensure representative strains and subsequent phenomena. In addition, these in-pile separate effects tests should include a blowdown phase. As mentioned before, this phase will provide representative conditions for the temperature transient inside the fuel to study the consequences in terms of thermomechanical pre-fragmentation during blowdown.

3.3.2 INTEGRAL TESTS.

This kind of tests will address the aspects of:

- impact of blowdown phase
- flow blockage
- quenching behaviour and coolability.

These tests should allow to check the absence of unexpected phenomena or unexpected coupling between foreseen processes, and finally provide data for the validation of reactor computational tools.

These tests should be realised with 9 high burn up rods with a ring of 12 or 16 fresh fuel rods which will provide a representative thermal environment in order to ensure representative strains and subsequent phenomena. A blowdown phase will be simulated depending on its importance as observed in the previous studies. Finally, additional axial stress during quenching due to rod blockage in the assembly should be simulated during these tests.

3.3.3 EXPERIMENTAL FACILITY

Such a programme is envisaged by the IPSN in the PHEBUS facility where some twenty LOCA tests were run between 76 and 83 [11,14], see figure 6. By this way IPSN would take advantage of the know-how accumulated when the previous LOCA programme with fresh fuel was run.

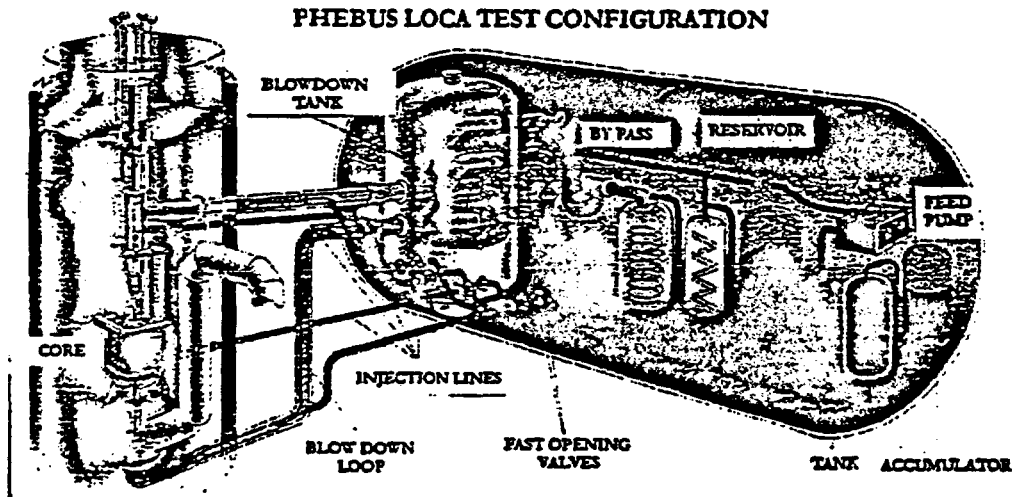


Figure 6

Furthermore, a new LOCA programme in the Phébus facility would take advantage of the R&D efforts made for the subsequent programmes in terms of high activity material measurements

Tomography technique [15,16] is one of the examples, which can be given how such efforts provide practical applications for the new LOCA programme. This technique provides the 3D location and the nature of the material fragments everywhere in a bundle. The exact geometry of the bundle at the end of the test can be reconstructed and explored from the inside. Fuel relocation studies and code validation will be made easier through this technique.



Figure 7

Presently, fragment size less than 500 microns can be located (see figure 7). Further improvement of the existing technique will increase the resolution providing several points inside the clad with an oxide/metal discrimination.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Studies performed in IPSN and elsewhere pointed out that high burnup may induce specific effects under LOCA conditions, especially those related with fuel relocation. Uncertainties exist regarding how much these effects might affect the late evolution of the accident transient and the associated safety issues. IPSN estimates that a better knowledge of specific phenomena is required in order to resolve the pending uncertainties related to LOCA criteria. IPSN is preparing the so-called APRP-Irradié (High Burnup fuel LOCA) programme. One of the important aspects of this programme is in-Pile experiments involving bundle geometries in the PHEBUS facility located at Cadarache, France. A feasibility study for such an experimental programme is underway and should provide soon a finalised project including cost and schedule aspects.

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**REGISTERED ATTENDEES
NUCLEAR SAFETY RESEARCH CONFERENCE**

K. ABE
Japan Atomic Energy Research Inst
Toka-mura, Ibaraki-ken 319-1195
Japan
Phone: 81 29 282 5028
Fax: 81 29 282 5408
E-Mail: k-abe@popsvr.tokai.jacri.go.jp

H.J. AHN
Korea Institute of Nuclear Safety
19 Kusongdong Yusongki
Taejon, 305-338 Korea
Phone: 82 42 868 0156
Fax: 82 42 861 9945
E-Mail: k096ahj@kins.re.kr

R. ANDERSEN
Nuclear Energy Institute
1776 I St., NW, Ste 400
Washington, DC 20006 USA
Phone: 202 739 8111
Fax: 202 785 4019
E-Mail: ria@nei.org

S. ANGHAI
University of Florida
202 NSC
Gainesville, FL 32611-8300 USA
Phone: 352 392 8653
Fax: 352 392 8656
E-Mail: anghaic@ufl.edu

A. ANKRUM
Battelle Pacific Northwest Nat'l Lab
PO Box 999 MSIN: K8-60
Richland, WA 99352 USA
Phone: 509 372 4095
Fax: 509 372 6485
E-Mail: alvin.ankrum@pnl.gov

G-S. AUH
Korea Institute of Nuclear Safety
PO Box 114, Yusong
Taejon, 305-600 Korea
Phone: 82-42-868-0466
Fax: 82-42-861-2535
E-Mail: k332ags@kins.re.kr

K. BAHR
Westinghouse
1717 Eagle Ridge Dr.
Monroeville, PA 15146 USA
Phone: 412 374 2149
Fax: 412 374 2045
E-Mail: bahrke@westinghouse.com

M. BALE
Framatome ANP
651 Lake Vista Drive
Forest, VA 24551 USA
Phone: 434-832-2488
Fax:
E-Mail: mbale@framatech.com

R. BELLES
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
PO Box 2009
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-8057 USA
Phone: 865 574 0388
Fax:
E-Mail: bellesrj@ornl.gov

D. BEST
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC USA
Phone: 202 781 6247
Fax:
E-Mail: best29@navsea.navy.mil

C. BEYER
Battelle Pacific Northwest Nat'l Lab
PO Box 999
Richland, WA 99352 USA
Phone: 509 372 4605
Fax: 509 372 6485
E-Mail: carl.beyer@pnl.gov

H. BIGOT
INOVA Networks, Inc.
9527 Ewing Drive
Bethesda, MD 20817 USA
Phone: 301-493-8865
Fax:
E-Mail: herve@inovannetworks.com

M. BILLONE
Argonne National Laboratory
Bldg. 212, 9700 S. Cass Ave.
Argonne, IL 60439 USA
Phone: 630 252 7146
Fax: 630 252 9232
E-Mail: billone@anl.gov

T. BLEJWAS
Sandia National Laboratories
PO Box 5800, MS 0736
Albuquerque, NM 87185-0736 USA
Phone: 505 844 0577
Fax: 505 844 0955
E-Mail: teblejw@sandia.gov

K. BORTON
Exelon Generation
300 Exelon Way
Kennet Square, PA 19348 USA
Phone: 610 765 5528
Fax: 610 765 5545
E-Mail:

B. BOYACK
Los Alamos National Laboratory
PO Box 1663
Los Alamos, NM 87545 USA
Phone: 505 667 2023
Fax: 505 665 2897
E-Mail: bboyack@lanl.gov

M. BOYD
US EPA/Radiation Protection Div.
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., NW (6608J)
Washington, DC 20460 USA
Phone: 202 564 9395
Fax: 202 565 2042
E-Mail: boyd.mike@epa.gov

J. BRAVERMAN
Brookhaven National Laboratory
PO Box 5000, Bldg. 130
Upton, NY 11973-5000 USA
Phone: 631 344 2186
Fax: 631 344 4255
E-Mail: braverma@bnl.gov

C. BRINKMAN
Westinghouse
12300 Twinbrook Pkwy, Suite 330
Rockville, MD 20852 USA
Phone: 301-881-7040
Fax: 301-881-7043
E-Mail:

J. BRONS
Nuclear Energy Institute
1776 I St., NW, Ste 400
Washington, DC 20006 USA
Phone: 202 739 8121
Fax: 202 785 1498
E-Mail: jb@nei.org

V. BRUCE
Urcunina LLC
143 Dewey Dr.
Annapolis, MD 21401 USA
Phone: 410 903 3220
Fax: 443 482 9149
E-Mail: vib66@earthlink.net

R. BUDNITZ
Future Resources Associates, Inc.
2039 Shattuck Ave., Suite 402
Berkeley, CA 94704 USA
Phone: 510 644 2700
Fax: 510 644 1117
E-Mail: budnitz@pacbell.net

A. CAMP
Sandia National Laboratories
PO Box 5800
Albuquerque, NM 87185-0747 USA
Phone: 505 844 5960
Fax: 505 844 1648
E-Mail: alcamp@sandia.gov

W. CARLSON
Westinghouse
PO Box 355
Pittsburgh, PA 15230-0355 USA
Phone: 412 374 2145
Fax: 412 374 2045
E-Mail: carlsowr@westinghouse.com

W. CHOE
TXU Electric
1601 Bryan St.
Dallas, TX 75201-3411 USA
Phone: 214 812 4371
Fax: 214 812 8687
E-Mail: whee.choe@txu.com

J. CONDE
Consejo de Seguridad Nuclear
Justo Dorado 11
Madrid, 28040 Spain
Phone: 34 91 3460253
Fax: 34 91 3460496
E-Mail: jmcl@csn.es

S. COPP
Duke Energy
526 S. Church St.
Charlotte, NC 28201 USA
Phone: 704 373 5620
Fax: 704 382 3993
E-Mail: gcopp@duke-energy.com

M. CUNNINGHAM
Battelle Pacific Northwest Nat'l Lab
PO Box 999
Richland, WA 99352 USA
Phone: 509 372 4987
Fax: 509 372 4989
E-Mail: mitch.cunningham@pnl.gov

J. BUTLER
Nuclear Energy Institute
1776 I St., NW, Ste 400
Washington, DC 20006 USA
Phone: 202 739 8108
Fax:
E-Mail: jcb@nei.org

T. CARDWELL
Texas Department of Health
1100 W. 49th
Austin, TX 78756 USA
Phone: 512 834 6688
Fax: 512 834 6654
E-Mail: Thomas.Cardwell@tdh.state.tx.us

D. CHAPIN
MPR Associates, Inc.
320 King St.
Alexandria, VA 22314 USA
Phone: 703 519 0200
Fax: 703 519 0224
E-Mail: dchapin@mpr.com

R. CHOU
Region II / NRC
61 Forsyth St., SW, AFC 24T13
Atlanta, GA 30303 USA
Phone: 404 562 4670
Fax: 404 562 4983
E-Mail: rcc2@nrc.gov

L. CONNOR
Consultant
2211 SW 1st Ave., #1502
Portland, OR 97201 USA
Phone: 503 309 7205
Fax: 503 224 7759
E-Mail: lynnbc@usa.net

J. CORTEZ
EMR&T
10101 Grosvenor Pl #1516
N. Bethesda, MD 20852 USA
Phone: 202 425-5435
Fax: 301 564 9515
E-Mail: jlmcortez@aol.com

J. DE BOR
Aeroflex Altair Cybernetics Corp.
4201 Northview Dr., Suite 302
Bowie, MD 20716 USA
Phone: 301 805 8300
Fax: 301 805 8122
E-Mail: jdebor@altaira.com

J. BUTRAGUENO
Consejo de Seguridad Nuclear
Justo Dorado, 11
Madrid, 28040 Spain
Phone: 91 346 04 07
Fax: 91 346 05 88
E-Mail: jibc@csn.es

M. CARELLI
Westinghouse
1344 Beulah Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15235 USA
Phone: 412-256-1042
Fax: 412-256-2444
E-Mail: carellmd@westinghouse.com

C. CHEN
Apollo Consulting, Inc.
12 Tewkesbury Dr.
Wyomissing, PA 19610-1839 USA
Phone: 610 678 0473
Fax: 610 678 6294
E-Mail: apollo@apolloconsultinginc.com

B.D. CHUNG
Korea Atomic Energy Res. Inst.
Dukjin 150, Yusong-Gu
Taejeon, 305 353 Korea
Phone: 82 42 868 8312
Fax: 82 42 868 8990
E-Mail: bdchung@kaeri.re.kr

L. CONWAY
Westinghouse
1344 Beulah Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15235 USA
Phone: 412-256-1189
Fax: 412-256-2444
E-Mail: conwayle@westinghouse.com

S. CRAWFORD
9722 Shadow Oak Dr.
Gaithersburg, MD 20886 USA
Phone: 301 216 3080
Fax:
E-Mail: scrwfrd@erols.com

D. DIAMOND
Brookhaven National Laboratory
Bldg. 130
Upton, NY 11973 USA
Phone: 631 344 2604
Fax: 631 344 3957
E-Mail: diamond@bnl.gov

S. DIEHL
Matrikon Consulting
906 12th Ave., SW
Calgary, Alberta Canada
Phone: 403-543-7315
Fax:
E-Mail: Scott.DIEHL@matrikon.com

B. DUNN
Framatome ANP
3315 Old Forest Rd.
Lynchburg, VA 24506 USA
Phone: 434 832 2427
Fax:
E-Mail: bdunn@framatech.com

S. DUNN
Kaye Scholer
McPherson Bldg., 901 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20005-2327 USA
Phone: 202 682 3584
Fax: 202 682 3580
E-Mail: sdunn@kayescholer.com

D. EBERT
ASTM INC.
5611 35th Ave.
Hyattsville, MD 20782 USA
Phone: 301 779 1039
Fax:
E-Mail: DavyDeanE@aol.com

T. FABIAN
Nuclear Waste News
8737 Colesville Rd., Suite 1100
Silver Spring, MD 20910 USA
Phone: 301 587 6300
Fax: 301 587 1081
E-Mail: tfabian@bpinews.com

M. FELTUS
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave.
Washington, DC 20585 USA
Phone: 202 586 0843
Fax:
E-Mail: madeline.feltus@hq.doe.gov

M. FERTEL
Nuclear Energy Institute
1776 I St., NW, Ste 400
Washington, DC 20006 USA
Phone: 202-739-8125
Fax: 202-293-3451
E-Mail: MSF@nci.org

H. FONTECILLA
Dominion
907 West Glebe Rd
Alexandria, VA 22305 USA
Phone: 703 838 2314
Fax: 703 838 2351
E-Mail: Herb_Fontecilla@dom.com

G. FRESCURA
OECD/Nuclear Energy Agency
2 Rue Pascal
Paris, France
Phone: 33-1-4524-1050
Fax:
E-Mail: frescura@nea.fr

T. FUNADA
Nuclear Power Engineering Corp.
3-17-1 Tranomon Minatoku
Tokyo, 105-0001 Japan
Phone: 81 3 4512 2855
Fax: 81 3 4512 2889
E-Mail: funada@nupec.or.jp

J. GAERTNER
EPRI
1300 W.T. Harris Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28262 USA
Phone: 704 547 6169
Fax: 704 547 6035
E-Mail: jgaertne@epri.com

R. GALLO
Consultant
2620 Meadow Hall Dr.
Oak Hill, VA 20171 USA
Phone: 703 318 9795
Fax: 703 318 0613
E-Mail: RGallo0611@aol.com

F. GANTENBEIN
IPSN
BP No. 6
Fontenay aux Roses Cedex, 92265
France
Phone: 33 1 4654 7816
Fax: 33 1 4654 7971
E-Mail: francoise.gantenbein@ipsn.fr

Y. GUAN
ASTM, Inc.
1750 Tysons Blvd., Ste 400
McLean, VA 22102 USA
Phone: 703 744 1070
Fax:
E-Mail: guan@astminc.com

L. GUNTER
Edlow International
1666 Connecticut Ave, NW, Ste 201
Washington, DC 20009 USA
Phone: 202 483 4959
Fax:
E-Mail: lgunter@edlow.com

B. HARTNETT
International Access Corporation
, USA
Phone: 202-223-7040
Fax:
E-Mail: Brad.Hartnett@verizon.net

T. HATTORI
Nuclear Power Engineering Corp.
3-17-1 Tranomon Minatoku
Tokyo, 105-0001 Japan
Phone: 81 3 4512 2674
Fax: 81 3 4512 2699
E-Mail: t-hattori@nupec.or.jp

J. HEBERT
Associated Press
7021 K. St. NW
Washington, DC 20006 USA
Phone: 202-776-9400
Fax: 202-776-9570
E-Mail: jhebert@ap.org

J. HIGGINS
Brookhaven National Laboratory
Building 130, 32 Lewis Rd.
Upton, NY 11973 USA
Phone: 631 344 2432
Fax: 631 344 4900
E-Mail: higgins@bnl.gov

P. HIGHBERGER
JAI Corporation
4103 Chain Bridge Rd.
Fairfax, VA 22030 USA
Phone:
Fax:
E-Mail:

E. HIRUO
Platts Nuclear Publications
1200 G St. NW, Suite 1100
Washington, DC 20005 USA
Phone: 202-383-2163
Fax: 202-383-2125
E-Mail: elaine_hiruo@platts.com

J. HOLM
Framatome ANP, Inc.
2101 Horn Rapids Rd.
Richland, WA 99352 USA
Phone: 509 375 8142
Fax: 509 375 8775
E-Mail: JerryS_Holm@nfuel.com

J. HOPKINS
SRI International
1611 N Kent St.
Arlington, VA 22209 USA
Phone: 703-247-8472
Fax: 703-247-8569
E-Mail: hopkins@wdc.sri.com

R. HUTCHINGS
1601 Mass. Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Phone: 202-797-3042
Fax: 202-797-3089
E-Mail: ronh@clark.net

J. JANSKY
BTB-Jansky GmbH
Berlenger Str 151
Leonberg, 71229 Germany
Phone: 07152 41058
Fax: 07152 73868
E-Mail: btb@btbjansky.com

A. KADAK
MIT - Nuclear Engineering Dept.
77 Massachusetts Ave., 24-207A
Cambridge, MA 02139 USA
Phone: 617 253 0166
Fax: 617 258 8863
E-Mail: kadak@mit.edu

H. KAWAKAMI
Nuclear Power Engineering Corp.
3-17-1 Tranomon Minatoku
Tokyo, 105-0001 Japan
Phone: 03 4514 5501
Fax: 03 4514 5509
E-Mail: kawakami@nupec.or.jp

C. KESSLER
Nuclear Energy Agency of OECD
LeSeine Segermain 12 Blvd des Lies
1854 Les Moulineaux (Paris), 92130
France
Phone: 33 1 4524 1002
Fax: 33 1 4524 1119
E-Mail: Carol.Kessler@oecd.org

H. HOLMSTROM
VTT Energy/Nuclear Energy
Tekniikantie 4C
Espoo, 02150 Finland
Phone: 358 9 4565050
Fax: 358 9 4565000
E-Mail: Heikki.Holmstrom@vtt.fi

W. HORAK
Brookhaven National Laboratory
Bldg. 475B, PO Box 5000
Upton, NY 11973-5000 USA
Phone: 631 344 2627
Fax: 631 344 7650
E-Mail: horak@bnl.gov

J. INDEBETOU
Swedish Nuclear Power Inspectorate
SE-106
Stockholm, SE-106 58 Sweden
Phone: 46 8 698 84 59
Fax: 46 8 661 90 86
E-Mail: Jan.IndeBetou@ski.se

F. JOGLAR
SAIC
11251 Roger Bacon Drive
Reston, VA 20190 USA
Phone: 703-318-4695
Fax: 703-810-8999
E-Mail: joglarbill@saic.com

M. KAMITSUMA
Japan NUS Co. Ltd., Energy Group
Loop-X Bldg 7F, 9-15 Kaigan
3-Chome, manato-ku
Tokyo, 1080022 Japan
Phone: 03 5440 1861
Fax:
E-Mail: mkamitsuma@janus.co.jp

S. KAWAMURA
Tokyo Electric Power Co.
1901 L Street NW, Suite 720
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Phone: 202 457 0790
Fax: 202 457 0810
E-Mail: shinichi.kawamura@tepcoco.jp

M. KHATIB-RAHBAR
Energy Research, Inc.
PO Box 2034
Rockville, MD 20852 USA
Phone: 301-881-0866
Fax:
E-Mail: MKR@ERJ_WORLD.COM

K. HOMBU
Nuclear & Industrial Safety Agency
1-1-1 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku
Tokyo, Japan
Phone: 81 3 3501 6289
Fax: 81 3 3501 0085
E-Mail: hombu-kazuhiko@meti.go.jp

H. HUNTER
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
PO Box 2008
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-6362 USA
Phone: 865 574 6297
Fax: 865 574 6182
E-Mail: hunterht@ornl.gov

R. JANATI
PA Dept. of Environmental
Protection
PO Box 8469, 400 Market St.
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8469 USA
Phone: 717 787 2163
Fax: 717 783 8965
E-Mail: rjanati@state.pa.us

R. JOHNSON
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20585 USA
Phone: 301 903 3860
Fax:
E-Mail: shane.johnson@hq.doe.gov

M. KANDA
Mitsubishi Heavy Industries America
PO Box 355, Suite 268 East
Pittsburgh, PA 15230 USA
Phone: 412 374 7395
Fax: 412 374 7377
E-Mail: makoto_kanda@mhihq.com

P. KERSTING
KW Consulting, Inc.
PO Box 101567
Pittsburgh, PA 15237 USA
Phone: 412 635 7333
Fax: 412 367 2195
E-Mail: paul@kwconsulting.com

H. KIM
Korea Institute of Nuclear Safety
PO Box 114, Yusong
Taejon, Korea
Phone: 82 42 868 0230
Fax: 82 42 861 9945
E-Mail: kimhj@kins.kr

H. KIM
Korea Institute of Nuclear Safety
19 Gu Song Dong,
Yu Song Gu, Taejon Rep. of Korea
Phone: 42-868-0133
Fax:
E-Mail: ko57khh@kins.re.kr

W. KROGER
Paul Scherrer Institut
Villigen PSI, CH 5232 Switzerland
Phone:
Fax:
E-Mail:

J.M. LANORE
IPSN
BP No. 6
Fontenay aux Roses, Cedex 92265
France
Phone: 33 1 4656 7648
Fax: 33 1 4654 8385
E-Mail: jeanne-marie.lanore.@ipsn.fr

R. LEE
Westinghouse
2000 Day Hill Road
Windsor, CT 06095 USA
Phone: 860-285-2834
Fax:
E-Mail:
robert.s.lee@us.westinghouse.com

R. LOFARO
Brookhaven National Laboratory
PO Box 5000, Bldg. 130
Upton, NY 11973-5000 USA
Phone: 631 344-7191
Fax: 631 344 5569
E-Mail: lofaro@bnl.gov

P. LYONS
Office of Senator Domenici
Hart Senate Office Building #328
Washington, DC 20510 USA
Phone: 202-224-4046
Fax: 202-228-0900
E-Mail: Peter_lyons@domenici.senate.gov

R. MAIERS
PA Dept. of Environmental
Protection
PO Box 8469, 400 Market St.
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8469 USA
Phone: 717 783 8979
Fax:
E-Mail: rmaiers@state.pa.us

B. KIRK
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
PO Box 2008
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-6362 USA
Phone: 865 574 6176
Fax: 865 574 6182
E-Mail: kirkl@ornl.gov

K. KUSSMAUL
Staatliche Materialprüfungsanstalt
Pfaffenwaldring 32
Stuttgart, D70569 Germany
Phone: 49 711 685 3582
Fax: 49 711 685 2698
E-Mail:
hannelore.eschle@mpa.uni-stuttgart.de

T. LEAHY
Idaho National Laboratory
PO Box 1625
Idaho Falls, ID 83415-3850 USA
Phone: 208 526 4944
Fax: 208 526 2930
E-Mail: tjl@inel.gov

Y. LIU
Argonne National Laboratory
9700 S. Cass Ave.
Argonne, IL 60439 USA
Phone: 630 252 5127
Fax: 630 252 3250
E-Mail: yyl@anl.gov

V. LOISELLE
CESC
109 Harwell Dr.
Columbia, SC 29223 USA
Phone: 803 736 5588
Fax: 803 736 5588
E-Mail: VLoiselle@aol.com

A. MACHIELS
EPRI
PO Box 10412
Palo Alto, CA 94303 USA
Phone: 650 855 2054
Fax:
E-Mail: amachiel@epri.com

M. MALSCH
LeBoeuf, Lamb, Greene & MacRae
1875 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite
1200
Washington, DC 20009-5728 USA
Phone: 202-986-8059
Fax: 202-986-8102
E-Mail: mmalsch@llgm.com

E. KOLSTAD
OECD Halden Reactor Project
PO Box 173, N-1751
Halden, Norway
Phone: 47 69 212200
Fax: 47 692 12201
E-Mail: erik.kolstad@hrp.no

J. LANG
EPRI
1300 W.T. Harris Blvd.
Charlotte, NC 28262 USA
Phone: 704 547 6066
Fax: 704 547 6168
E-Mail: jlang@epri.com

C. LECOMTE
Institut de Protection et Surete
Nucleaire
BPE CE Fontenay aux Roses
Fontenay aux Roses, Cedex 92265
France
Phone: 01 46 56 7736
Fax: 01 46 56 7971

M. LIVOLANT
IPSN
BP No. 6
Fontenay aux Roses, Cedex 92265
France
Phone: 01 46 547 179
Fax: 01 46 549511
E-Mail: michel.livolant@ipsn.fr

E. LYMAN
Nuclear Control Institute
1000 Connecticut Ave, NW, Ste. 410
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Phone: 202 822 6594
Fax: 202 452 0892
E-Mail: lyman@nci.org

W. MAGWOOD
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20585 USA
Phone: 202 586 6630
Fax:
E-Mail: william.magwood@hq.doe.gov

T. MARSTON
EPRI
PO Box 10412
Palo Alto, CA 94303 USA
Phone: 650 855 2997
Fax: 650 855 1026
E-Mail: tmarston@epri.com

B. MAVKO
Josef Stefan Institute
Jamova 39
Ljubljana, 01000 Slovenia
Phone: 386-1-5885-330
Fax:
E-Mail: borut.mavko@ijs.si

C. MEINHOLD
Nat'l Council on Rad Prot & Measure
7910 Woodmont Ave.
Bethesda, MD 20825 USA
Phone: 301 657 2652
Fax: 301 907 8768
E-Mail: ncrpexec@ncrp.com

T. MILLER
U.S. Department of Energy
19901 Germantown Road
Germantown, MD 20874-1290 USA
Phone: 301-903-4517
Fax: 301-903-5057
E-Mail: Tom.Miller@hq.DOE.GOV

D. MODEEN
NEI
1776 1st, NW #400
Washington, DC 20006 USA
Phone: 202-739-8084
Fax: 202-785-4019
E-Mail: djm@nei.org

J. MORONEY
MPR Associates, Inc.
320 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314 USA
Phone: 703-519-0521
Fax:
E-Mail: jmoroney@mpr.com

M. MUHLHEIM
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
PO Box 2009
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-8045 USA
Phone: 865 574 0386
Fax: 865 574 0382
E-Mail: muhlheimmd@ornl.gov

R. NANSTAD
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
PO Box 2008
Oak Ridge, TN 37831 USA
Phone: 865-574-4471
Fax: 865-574-0641
E-Mail: nanstadrk@ornl.gov

G. MAYS
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
PO Box 2008
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-8045 USA
Phone: 865 574 0394
Fax: 865 574 0382
E-Mail: maysgt@ornl.gov

G. MICHAELS
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
PO Box 2008
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-6138 USA
Phone: 865 574 4187
Fax: 865 241 7879
E-Mail: michaelsg@ornl.gov

D. MITCHELL
Westinghouse
5801 Bluff Rd
Columbia, SC 29250 USA
Phone: 803 647 3611
Fax: 803 695 4170
E-Mail: mitched@westinghouse.com

R. MONTGOMERY
ANATECH
5435 Oberlin Dr.
San Diego, CA 92121 USA
Phone: 858-455-6350
Fax: 858-455-1094
E-Mail: rob@anatech.com

C. MOSES
Canadian Nuclear Safety
Commission
280 Slater St.
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5S9 Canada
Phone: 613 996 7360
Fax:
E-Mail: moses@c@cnsc-ccsn.gc.ca

Y. MURAO
Nuclear Safety Commission
3-1-1, Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku
Tokyo, 100-8970 Japan
Phone: 81 3 3581 9949
Fax: 81 3 3581 9837
E-Mail: ymurao@op.cao.go.jp

M. NEIL
Canadian Nuclear Safety
Commission
280 Slater St.
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5S9 Canada
Phone: 613 996 7323
Fax:
E-Mail: neilm@cnsc-ccsn.gc.ca

C.B. MEADORS
Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, LLP
1800 M St., NW
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Phone: 202 467 7861
Fax:
E-Mail:

J. MIHALCIK
Constellation Nuclear
1650 Calvert cliffs Parkway (PUP-A)
Lusby, MD 20657 USA
Phone: 410 495 4780
Fax: 410 495 2828
E-Mail: joseph.a.mihalcik@ccnppi.com

N. MIYAZAWA
Japan Electric Power Info Center
1120 Connecticut Ave., Suite 1070
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Phone: 202 955 5610
Fax: 202 955 5612
E-Mail: genden@jepic.com

S. MORI
Kansai Electric Power Co., Inc.
2001 L St., NW, Ste 801
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Phone: 202 659 1138
Fax: 202 457 0272
E-Mail: mori@kansai.com

D. MOSS
Numark Associates
1220 19th St., NW Suite 500
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Phone: 202-466-2700
Fax:
E-Mail: dmoss@numarkassoc.com

F. NAGASE
Japan Atomic Energy Research Inst
Shirakata-shirane 2-4
Tokai-mura, Ibaraki 319-1195 Japan
Phone: 81 29 282 5955
Fax: 81 29 282 6160
E-Mail: nagase@popsvr.tokai.jaeri.go.jp

S. NOWLEN
Sandia National Laboratories
PO Box 5800
Albuquerque, NM 87185 USA
Phone: 505-845-9850
Fax: 505-844-2829
E-Mail: spnowle@sandia.gov

Z. OGISO
Nuclear Power Engineering Corp.
3-17-1 Tranomon Minatoku
Tokyo, 105-0001 Japan
Phone: 81 3 3435 3427
Fax: 81 3 3435 3428
E-Mail: ogiso@nupec.or.jp

S. ORLOFF
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC USA
Phone: 202 781 6227
Fax:
E-Mail: orloffsr@navsea.navy.mil

L. OTT
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
PO Box 2008
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-8057 USA
Phone: 865 574 0324
Fax: 865 574 8216
E-Mail: otlj@ornl.gov

C. PARK
Kepco Nuclear Fuel Co.
150 Deogjin-Dong Yusung-Gu
Daejeon, 305-353 Korea
Phone: 82 42 868 1850
Fax: 82 42 863 4430
E-Mail: copark@mail.knfc.co.kr

J.L. PETITCLERC
IPSN
BP No. 6
Fontenay aux Roses, 92265 France
Phone: 33 1 4654 9060
Fax: 33 1 4654 8925
E-Mail: jean-louis.petitclerc@ipsn.fr

G. POTTS
Global Nuclear Fuel
102 Trombay Dr.
Wilmington, NC 284122 USA
Phone: 910 675-5708
Fax: 910 675 6966
E-Mail: gerald.potts@gnf.com

M. RESNIK
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC USA
Phone: 202 781 6108
Fax:
E-Mail: resnikme@navsea.navy.mil

T. OKKONEN
Radiation & Nuclear Safety
Authority
Nuclear Reactor Reg., PO Box 14
Helsinki, FIN 00881 Finland
Phone: 358 9 75988299
Fax: 358 9 75988382
E-Mail: timo.okkonen@stuk.fi

J. OSBORNE
Constellation Nuclear
1650 Calvert Cliffs Pkwy
Lusby, MD 20657 USA
Phone: 410 495 2252
Fax: 410 495 2828
E-Mail: john.m.osborne@ccnppi.com

O. OZER
EPRI
PO Box 10412
Palo Alto, CA 94303 USA
Phone: 650 855 2089
Fax: 650 855 1026
E-Mail: oozer@epri.com

K.C. PARK
Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Co.
167 Samseong-dong, Gangnam-gu
Seoul, 135-791 Korea
Phone: 02 2 3456 2595
Fax: 02 2 3456 2559
E-Mail: parkkc@khnpp.co.kr

L. PHILLIPS
Consultant
118 Monroe St., #705
Rockville, MD 20850 USA
Phone: 301 294 3069
Fax: 301 294 0291
E-Mail: larryphillips55@cs.com

N. RAMCHANDANI
Matrikon
Ste. 1800, 10405 Jasper Ave.
Edmonton, AB T5K 2W1 Canada
Phone: 1 780 707 9651
Fax: 1 780 448 9191
E-Mail: nand.ramchandani@matrikon.com

R. REYNOLDS
Framatome ANP, Inc.
3315 Old Forest Rd., PO Box 10935
Lynchburg, VA 24506-0935 USA
Phone: 434 832 3659
Fax: 434 832 2932
E-Mail: rreynolds@framatech.com

M. O'MEALIA
Eagan & Associates, PLLC
7918 Jones Branch Dr., Ste 600
McLean, Va 22102 USA
Phone: 703 918 4945
Fax: 703 918 4943
E-Mail: mkoeire@hotmail.com

A. OSUGA
Mitsubishi Heavy Industries America
PO Box 355, Suite 268East
Pittsburgh, PA 15230 USA
Phone: 412 374 7395
Fax: 412 374 7377
E-Mail: danaraeshp@alltel.net

A. PAL
Entergy Nuclear Northeast
440 Hamilton Ave.
White Plains, NY 10601 USA
Phone: 914 272 3518
Fax: 914 272 3382
E-Mail: apal@entergy.com

S.D. PARK
Korea Electric Power Research Inst.
Moonji-Dong
Taejeon, Korea
Phone: 82 42 685 5670
Fax: 82 42 865 5504
E-Mail: spark@kepri.re.kr

R. PIREK
Westinghouse
2000 Day Hill Rd
Windsor, CT 06095 USA
Phone: 860 731 1865
Fax: 860 731 1824
E-Mail:
Ronald.C.Pirek@us.westinghouse.com

J. RASHID
Anatech
5435 Oberlin Dr.
San Diego, CA 92121 USA
Phone: 858 455 6350
Fax: 858 455 1094
E-Mail: joe@anatech.com

I. RICKARD
Westinghouse
2000 Day Hill Rd.
Windsor, CT 06095 USA
Phone: 860 731 6289
Fax: 860 731 6708
E-Mail:
ian.c.rickard@us.westinghouse.com

D. RISHER
Westinghouse
4350 Northern Pike
Monroeville, PA 15146-2886 USA
Phone: 412-374-5774
Fax:
E-Mail: risherdh@westinghouse.com

K. ROGERS
KCR
6202 Perthshire Ct.
Bethesda, MD 20817 USA
Phone: 301 530 4489
Fax: 301 530 4033
E-Mail: kcrogers@aol.com

M. SADEGHI
Federal Aviation Administration
1601 Lind Ave.
Renton, WA 98055 USA
Phone: 425-227-2117
Fax: 425-227-1100
E-Mail: massoud.sadeghi@faa.gov

A. SCHNEIDER
NRCN/Physics/LAEC
PO Box 9001
Beer Sheva, 84965 Israel
Phone: 972 8 6567019
Fax:
E-Mail: schne@netvision.net.il

V. SHAH
Argonne National Laboratory
Argonne, IL 60439-4825 USA
Phone: 630-252-5848
Fax: 630-252-3250
E-Mail: vnshah@anl.gov

W. SLAGLE
Westinghouse
4350 Northern Pike, Energy Center
Site, MS ECE 4-24
Monroeville, PA 15146-2886 USA
Phone: 412 374 2088
Fax: 412 374 2045
E-Mail: slaglewh@westinghouse.com

B. SNYDER
Energy & Management Consultants
11005 Hunt C18b Dr.
Potomac, MD 20854 USA
Phone: 301 983 9526
Fax: 301 983 9526
E-Mail: bsnyder@ioip.com

S. RITTERBUSCH
Westinghouse
2000 Day Hill Rd.
Windsor, CT 06095 USA
Phone: 860 731 6621
Fax: 860 731 6588
E-Mail:
stanley.e.ritterbusch@us.westinghouse.co

T. ROSSEEL
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
PO Box 2008
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-6138 USA
Phone: 865 574 5380
Fax: 865 241 3650
E-Mail: rosseeltm@ornl.gov

M. SATTISON
Idaho National Laboratory
PO Box 1625, MS3870
Idaho Falls, ID 83415-3870 USA
Phone: 208-526-9626
Fax: 208-526-2930
E-Mail: sbm@inel.gov

D. SCHRIRE
Studs vik Nuclear AB
Nykoping, 61182 Sweden
Phone: 46 155 221000
Fax: 46 155 263156
E-Mail: david.schrire@studsvik.se

R. SIMARD
Nuclear Energy Institute
1776 I St., NW, Ste 400
Washington, DC 20006 USA
Phone: 202 739 8128
Fax: 202 293 3451
E-Mail: rts@nei.org

C. SMITH
ISL, Inc.
11140 Rockville Pike, Suite 500
Rockville, MD 20852 USA
Phone: 301-255-2265
Fax: 301-468-0883
E-Mail: csmith@islinc.com

K. SODA
Japan Atomic Energy Research Inst
2-2-2 Uchisaiwaicho
Chiyodaku, Tokyo 100-0011 Japan
Phone: 81 3 3592 2156
Fax: 81 3 3592 2159
E-Mail: soda@hems.jaeri.go.jp

E. RODWELL
EPRI
PO Box 10412
Palo Alto, CA 94303 USA
Phone: 650 855 8784
Fax:
E-Mail: erodwell@epri.com

P. RUDLING
ANT
Uppsala Science Park
Uppsala, 75183 Sweden
Phone: 46 70 6696681
Fax: 46 18 506685
E-Mail: peter.rudling@ante.se

P. SAVEROT
JAI Corporation
4103 Chain Bridge Rd., Suite 200
Fairfax, VA 22030 USA
Phone: 703 359 9355
Fax: 703 359 0842
E-Mail: psaverot@jaicorp.com

W. SHACK
Argonne National Laboratory
Bldg. 212
Argonne, IL 60439 USA
Phone: 630 252 5137
Fax: 630 252 4798
E-Mail: wjshack@anl.gov

J. SIMPSON
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
PO Box 2008
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-6210 USA
Phone: 865 574 0422
Fax: 865 251 5005
E-Mail: simpsonjj@ornl.gov

W. SMITH
Bechtel Power Corp.
5275 Westview Dr.
Frederick, MD 21703-8306 USA
Phone: 301 228 6096
Fax: 301 360 0239
E-Mail: wasmith@bechtel.com

P. STOREY
Nuclear Installations Inspectorate,
HSE
NSD4A, Rm 314, St. Peters House,
Balliol Rd
Boothle, Merseyside, L20 3LZ UK
Phone: 44 151 951 4172
Fax: 44 151 951 4100

A. STRASSER
Aquarius Services Corp.
17 Pokahoe Dr.
Sleepy Hollow, NY 10591 USA
Phone: 914 366 8875
Fax: 914 366 8876
E-Mail: Stras69@attn.et

D. SUNDERLAND
ANATECH Corp.
321 Main Mall
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601-3116 USA
Phone: 845-454-6100
Fax: 845-454-2292
E-Mail: dion@anatech.com

R. TEJANI
Matrikon International Inc.
90 90 Ridgedale Ave.
East Hanover, NJ 07936 USA
Phone: 201-681-0296
Fax:
E-Mail: riaz.tejani@matrikon.com

R. TREGONING
Naval Surface Warfare Center
9500 MacArthur Blvd.
West Bethesda, MD 20817-5700
USA
Phone: 301 227 5145
Fax: 301 227 5548
E-Mail: tregoningr1@nswccd.navy.mil

R. UHRIG
Univ. of Tennessee, Nuclear
Engineering
306 Pasqua Engineering Bldg.
Knoxville, TN 37996-2300 USA
Phone: 865 974 3110
Fax: 865 974 0668
E-Mail: ruhrig@utk.edu

T. VANTTOLA
VTT Energy/Nuclear Energy
Tekniikantie 4C, PO Box 1604
Espoo, FIN-02044 VTT Finland
Phone: 358 9 456 5020
Fax: 358 9 456 5000
E-Mail: Timo.Vanttola@vtt.fi

J.A. WANG
Oak Ridge National Laboratory
PO Box 2008
Oak Ridge, TN 37831-6370 USA
Phone: 865 574 2274
Fax: 865 574 4018
E-Mail: wangja@ornl.gov

V. STRIZHOV
Nuclear Safety Institute (IBRAE)
B. Tulsckaya 52
Moscow, 113191 Russia
Phone: 7 095 9580873
Fax: 7 095 9580409
E-Mail: vfs@ibrae.ac.ru

T. TAKANO
Japan Electric Power Info Center
1120 Connecticut Ave, NW, Ste
1070
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Phone: 202 955 5610
Fax: 202 955 5612
E-Mail: tohoku@jepic.com

S. TETREAU
Donrey Media Group
666 11th Street NW, Suite 535
Washington, DC 20001 USA
Phone: 202-783-1760
Fax: 202-783-1955
E-Mail: STetreauH@donreyck.com

S. TRUBATCH
Foley & Lardner
888 16th Street NW
Washington, DC 20006 USA
Phone: 202-835-8012
Fax: 202-835-8137
E-Mail: strubatch@foleylaw.com

J. VALENTINO
International Access Corporation
1015 18th Street, NW, Suite 504
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Phone: 202-223-7040
Fax: 202-296-5373
E-Mail: valentino@iacdc.com

D. VOGT
Lawrence Livermore National Lab
PO Box 808, L-638
Livermore, CA 94550 USA
Phone: 925 423 7798
Fax: 925 422 9913
E-Mail: vogt3@llnl.gov

P. WEBSTER
Canadian Nuclear Safety
Commission
280 Slater St.
Ottawa, Ontario K1H 7E3 Canada
Phone: 613 947 2771
Fax: 613 995 5086
E-Mail: websterp@cnsccsn.gc.ca

R. SUGARMAN
Morgan Lewis
1800 M St., NW
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Phone: 202-467-3725
Fax: 202-467-7176
E-Mail: rsugarman@morganlewis.com

S.W. TAM
Argonne National Laboratory
9700 S Cass Ave
Argonne, IL 60439 USA
Phone: 630 252 6602
Fax: 630 252 3250
E-Mail: tam@anl.gov

J. THORP
Constellation Energy Group
2559 Aspen Road
Port Republic, MD 20676-2615
USA
Phone: 410-495-2724
Fax: 410-495-2828
E-Mail: John.thorp@ccnppi.com

N. TYLER
Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant
1650 Calvert Cliffs Parkway
Lusby, MD 20657 USA
Phone: 401 495 6714
Fax:
E-Mail: Edmund.M.Tyler@ccnppi.com

K. VALTONEN
Radiation & Nuclear Safety
Authority
PO Box 14/Laippatie 4
Helsinki, FIN 00881 Finland
Phone: 358 9 75988331
Fax: 358 9 75988382
E-Mail: keijo.valtonen@stuk.fi

N. WAECKEL
EPRI/EDF
3412 Hillview Ave.
Palo Alto, CA 94304 USA
Phone: 650-855-8688
Fax: 650-855-1026
E-Mail: nicolas@waeckel@edf.fr

J. WEIL
McGraw-Hill
1200 G St., NW, Ste. 1100
Washington, DC 20005 USA
Phone: 202-383-2161
Fax: 202-383-2125
E-Mail: jenny-weil@platts.com

R. WEINER
KW Consulting, Inc.
PO Box 101567
Pittsburgh, PA 15237 USA
Phone: 412 635 7732
Fax: 412 687 3965
E-Mail: bob@kwconsulting.com

R. YANG
EPRI
3412 Hillview Ave.
Palo Alto, CA 94304 USA
Phone: 650 855 2481
Fax: 650 855 1026
E-Mail: ryang@epri.com

Y. YOSHIOKA
International Access Corporation
1015 18th Street, NW, Suite 504
Washington, DC 20036 USA
Phone: 202-223-7040
Fax: 202-296-5373
E-Mail:

J. ZHANG
Tractebel Energy Engineering
Ave. Ariane 7
Brussels, 01200 Belgium
Phone: 0032-2-7739843
Fax: 32-2-7738900
E-Mail: jinzhao.zhang@tractebel.com

C. WHEAL
Aeroflex Altair Cybernetics Corp.
4201 Northview Dr., Suite 302
Bowie, MD 20716 USA
Phone: 301 805 8300
Fax: 301 805 8122
E-Mail: cwheal@altaira.com

S. YIM
Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll,
LLP
601 13 St, NW
Washington, DC 20005 USA
Phone: 202 661 7615
Fax:
E-Mail: yims@ballardspahr.com

R. YOUNGBLOOD
ISL, Inc.
11140 Rockville Pike, Suite 500
Rockville, MD 20852 USA
Phone: 301 255 2270
Fax: 301 468 0883
E-Mail: ryoungblood@islinc.com

M. ZIMMERMAN
Paul Scherrer Institut
Villigen PSI, CH 5232 Switzerland
Phone: 41 56 310 2733
Fax: 41 56 310 2327
E-Mail: martin.zimmermann@psi.ch

E. WIESER
Nuclear Waste News
8737 Colesville Rd., Suite 1100
Silver Spring, MD 20910 USA
Phone: 301 587 6300
Fax: 301 587 1081
E-Mail: ewieser@bpinews.com

K. YOON
Framatome ANP
3315 Old Forest Road
Lynchburg, VA 24501 USA
Phone: 434-832-3280
Fax: 434-832-2831
E-Mail: kyom@framatech.com

D. ZANNONI
State of New Jersey
9 Tudor Ct.
Ewing, NJ 08628 USA
Phone: 609 984 7440
Fax:
E-Mail: dzannoni@dep.state.nj.us