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In Aftermath of Plutonium Accident at Cadarache MOX Facility, U.S.
Weapons Plutonium Shipment to France Must be Halted

Charleston, SC, September 11, 2004 - In response to yesterday's revelation of an accident at the French Cadarache nuclear plant (1), which has contaminated two workers, Greenpeace has called for the immediate cancellation of next week's plans to send US weapons grade plutonium to the facility.

According to a statement by the French state-owned nuclear company CEA, two workers were contaminated on Monday when radioactive plutonium and uranium leaked from a container. The workers are now undergoing urgent health checks. The CEA said the accident was due to a "violation of procedures."

"In addition to exposing the workers to danger, this accident exposes risks of producing plutonium MOX fuel. It is one more reason why the United States should not send its plutonium to Cadarache next week," said Shaun Burnie of Greenpeace International.

The French nuclear facility, which is operated by nuclear state company AREVA/Cogema, has a long history of leaks and accidents. The facility has been closed due to seismic safety concerns but, before the accident, was planned to be reopened to process the US plutonium.

"While shipment of plutonium sets a bad for a world seeking establishment of sound non-proliferation policies, it would be even worst to send the plutonium to France and then have to ship it back due to the accident at Cadarache," said Tom Clements of Greenpeace International, now in Charleston awaiting the arrival of the plutonium transport ships. "The Department of Energy must halt the shipment and immediately determine the impact of the accident at the Cadarache MOX facility."

"There is no justification for this transport as the whole policy of using weapons plutonium in reactors is dangerously misguided. After September 11th terrorist attack, any risk to international security by shipping plutonium across the ocean should be automatically avoided." said Yannick Rousselet of Greenpeace France.

Two armed British ships are expected to arrive at the South Carolina port of Charleston in the coming days to pick up a cargo of weapons grade plutonium.

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Notes to Editor:

(1) The accident occurred at the 'ATPu' plutonium fuel (MOX) manufacturing plant at the Cadarache nuclear complex. The ATPu will be used for three months to manufacture MOX fuel before shipping it back to the United States. A detailed report on ATPu can be found at: <http://www.stop-plutonium.org> in a report for Greenpeace International in July 2003 "LTA Briefing" commissioned by GPI from independent consultancy WISE-Paris.

CEA news release (in French) on the plutonium accident can be found at: <http://www.cea.fr/fr/actualites/articles.asp?orig=actu&id=569>

Photos and background information on nuclear transport ships and plutonium in France available at <http://www.stop-plutonium.org> and <http://www.noplutonium.org>

A few of the questions which must be answered about the Cadarache accident before the US plutonium shipment goes forward:

- 1) How long will a Board of Enquiry take before the Cadarache plant is certified to recommence operation?
- 2) Will the modifications to the plant and or its operating procedures be substantial and how long will it take to prove and implement these?
- 3) What is the extent of contamination and how long will it take to decontaminate?
- 4) Could the cost of decontaminating (and putting right) the plant outweigh the US Pu work which is scheduled to be its last consignment (ie the plant never restarts)?
- 5) If the Cadarache plant is out of operation upon arrival of the US Pu at Cherbourg where will the US Pu be stored, for how long and under whose control?;
- 6) Will any Cadarache delays impinge upon the MOX loading in the Catawba reactor?
- 7) Will Euratom investigate and report upon the Cadarache incident ? (Because it is the expectation of the US DOE that Euratom acts as the formal reporter in its treaty with Europe and its constituent states.)