

Clippings ... from the *New York Times*

Here's what was in the news this summer.

New Reactor Solves Plutonium Problem

To the Editor:

Your June 26 editorial about the Integral Fast Reactor repeats a false accusation that the reactor, now in the final stages of research, is being developed as a breeder reactor.

The Integral Fast Reactor is being designed as an advanced source of clean energy that can consume spent reactor fuel as well as weapons-grade plutonium. It is the only technology that can destroy plutonium through its actinide recycle process. The benefits in promoting nuclear nonproliferation are clear: this technology eliminates plutonium instead of just burying it in the ground and leaving the problem for future generations.

You are mistaken in suggesting that the reactor produces bomb-grade plutonium: it never separates plutonium; the fuel goes into the reactor in a metal alloy form that contains highly radioactive actinides. A recent Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory study indicates that fuel from this reactor is more proliferation-resistant than spent commercial fuel, which also contains plutonium.

You also quote Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary in suggesting that continuation of research on this reactor would send the wrong signal to countries that reprocess spent fuel and separate plutonium to fuel their commercial reactors. What signal do we send to the Japanese and others when we refuse their cost-sharing funds to develop such reactor technology and leave them to proceed with a process that produces bomb-grade material? The Integral Fast Reactor is good energy policy and good nonproliferation policy. (Senator) PAUL SIMON

(Senator) DIRK KEMPTHORNE
Washington, June 28, 1994

Reactor Was Designed To Breed Plutonium

To the Editor:

The inaccurate information on the Integral Fast Reactor comes from Senators Paul Simon and Dirk Kempthorne (letter, July 5), not from your June 26 editorial. The reactor was designed for breeding plutonium and can readily be converted to do so. The Congressional Office of Technology Assessment recently concluded that for the purpose of evaluating the reactor's potential impact on proliferation risks, "it must be considered a breeder-capable reactor system."

Similarly, while the reactor and its associated plutonium recycling system are not now designed to produce plutonium pure enough to be used in a nuclear weapon, a proliferating nation could adapt them for that purpose. The Technology Assessment report quoted a document prepared by the reactor's developers acknowledging the "uncontested fact that it would be technically possible to make nuclear explosives from material extracted in some (unspecified) fashion from an I.F.R. process stream."

The Senators also worry about the impact of cancellation of the Integral Fast Reactor on Japan, which plans to produce tons of plutonium over the next decade for its civilian nuclear program. But if they are genuinely concerned about the proliferation risks, they should advocate Japanese stockpiling of non-weapon-usable uranium fuel as an alternative. This is a far better solution than the Integral Fast Reactor, which is decades away from commercial deployment.

Since Illinois and Idaho are home to the reactor project, it is understandable perhaps that senators from those two states would leap to its defense. But that is no reason for the Federal Government to spend the \$3 billion required to complete the project.

PAUL LEVENTHAL
DANIEL HORNER

Washington, July 6, 1994

The writers are, respectively, president and deputy director, Nuclear Control Institute.