

Associated Students of the University of California

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STUDENT BODY PRESIDENTS' COUNCIL

Kayleen Kott  
359 Memorial Union  
University of California  
Davis, California 95616  
August 23, 1984

CHAIRMAN PALLADINO  
Commissioner Asselstine  
Commissioner Roberts  
Commissioner Bernthal  
Commissioner Zech  
U.S. Nuclear Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Commissioners:

You have recently issued a proposed regulation to convert U.S. nuclear research reactors from the use of weapons-grade (highly enriched) uranium due to the unique proliferation hazards involved. The Congress has appropriated \$2 million for the first year to begin the conversions.

The Student Body Presidents' Council of the University of California, representing 140,000 students on nine campuses, has officially come out in strong support of conversion of all research reactors to non-bomb-grade uranium. We therefor applaud your proposed action in this regard and urge that it go forward expeditiously, without diminishing its intent of enhancing national and international security.

Enclosed please find the SBPC resolution and our comments on the proposed rule as published in the Federal Register.

We urge you continuing attention to this important matter.

Sincerely yours,

/s/

Kayleen Kott, Chair  
University of California  
Student Body Presidents' Council

enclosure: SBPC resolution and comments on proposed HEU conversion rule

cc w/enclosures: Representatives Udall, Markey, Ottinger, Brown  
Levine, Beilenson

Senators Hatfield, Cranston, Wilson

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## RESOLUTION

Supporting the Proposed Rule by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission on Limiting the Use of Highly Enriched Uranium in Domestic Research and Test Reactors

WHEREAS, 31 non-power nuclear reactors are licensed in the United States to use highly enriched uranium (HEU)- 25 are owned by universities including one at UCLA and one at UC Santa Barbara, 5 are owned by private corporations and 1 is owned by the U.S. government; and

WHEREAS, highly enriched uranium can be used without further significant processing and without extensive expertise to build nuclear weapons; and

WHEREAS, the security level at these facilities especially at those on university campuses are not sufficient to even moderately protect from a threat of theft; and

WHEREAS, the threat of terrorism is rapidly escalating world-wide and HEU could sell for over \$100,000 per kilogram on the black market; and

WHEREAS, the United States government has spoken out around the world for the reduction of HEU, while at the same time the U.S. exports about 600 kilograms annually (the most in the world) and has not made an effort to limit the almost 500 kilograms of HEU within the U.S.; and

WHEREAS, the reduction of HEU within the U.S. may provide an example and incentive for other nations to emulate thus reducing the danger of international terrorism; and

WHEREAS, the low enriched uranium (LEU) fuels can be used without significant reduction in performance or research potential; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Student Body Presidents' Council supports immediate conversion from HEU to LEU internationally and especially within the United States and that the rule must allow no exemptions if it is to accomplish its goal of enhancing national and international security.

8/18/84

KJG

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STUDENT BODY PRESIDENTS' COUNCIL

Kayleen Kott  
359 Memorial Union  
University of California  
Davis, California 95616

August 24, 1984

Att: Docketing and Service Branch  
Secretary of the Commission  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20555

Re: HEU Conversion Rule (49 Federal Register 27769)

Dear Sir:

The Student Body Presidents' Council of the University of California, representing 140,000 students on nine campuses, strongly supports the proposed regulation to require conversion of all non-power reactors from highly enriched uranium (HEU) to the safer low enriched uranium (LEU). Enclosed please find a copy of an SBPC resolution 8/18/84 supporting immediate conversion allowing no exemptions thus enhancing national and international security.

The SBPC does not understand the NRC's preoccupation with the cost of conversion. We understand that financial considerations are important "in determining the availability of LEU fuel (which for many facilities is free or relatively inexpensive due to oversupply at similar facilities) and schedule for conversion. However, it does not seem appropriate that the NRC concern itself with the "economics of conversion" as much as it should serve the public by assuring both public health and safety. If the NRC passes stringent regulations the federal government will be encouraged to provide funding such as the Department of Energy has shown with \$2 million to begin conversion in the first year. The cost of conversion, in the first year. The cost of conversion, no matter who pays, is minimal compared to the cost of theft or accident of these research reactors. Plus consider the cost of improving security at these research reactors to adequately protect this valuable and vulnerable material.

The time frame proposed by the NRC is of concern to the students of California. According to the proposed rule a licensee would not even be required to submit a proposed schedule for conversion for 12 months after passage of this rule. We believe one year is too long to wait to begin actual conversion. Furthermore this regulation does not establish a date by which licensees must complete conversion. The scheduling of shipping casks should not effect the time frame since transportation time even across country could be no more than a few weeks. Also conversion dates should not be effected by federal funding since the individual licensees have a responsibility to assure that their reactors comply to safety regulations.

The idea of "generic envelopes of safety limits for the several types of non-power reactors" is not acceptable to SBPC, although we do see the need for generic safety analysis for fuels. Licensees should not be required to merely submit to

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HEU Conversion Rule pg. 2

a set of vague generic rules but rather be required to prove conversion has created no reduction in safty. If there are any questions as to the safty of the reactors due to conversion the public should be allowed to address these questions in a public hearing. The right to public hearing on safty issues is guarenteed by the Atomic Energy Act and should not be forfeited in this regulation or any regulation. Also licensees should be required to conduct an environmental impact statement for any questions of safty or health. This statement like the "analysis showing that...normal operating and postulated accident conditions... fall within the limits" must be carefully checked by the NRC and be available for public inspection.

The posibility for exemptions seems overly lenient in this regulation. Reactors with a "unique purpose" could be exempt from conversion which could diminish the intent of the regulation which is to enhance national and international security. The regulation states reactors with "a special experiment or program" would be a candidate for exemption. One experiment should not overturn this needed regulation. Those research projects based on neutron flux levels or spectra are attainable with LEU fuels as well as HEU fuels with only slight modifications.

The NRC is encouraged to require MEU (medium enriched uranium) as close to 20% in those very rare cases where LEU, below 20%, is not possible. However, in almost all domestic research reactors conversion below 20% is possible at this time. For this reason the "continued success of the DOE funded RERTR program" although desirable is not cruxial to the success of HEU conversion.

In summary, the SBPC makes the following recommendations. \*  
The NRC base its decision for conversion of non-power reactors on the safty and health of the public and not on economic considerations.  
The timeframe to submit schedule for conversion be shortened and that the NRC set a date for reactors to complet conversion.  
There be no generic envelopes of safety limits but rather require licensees to prove no reduction in safty has been created by conversion.  
The public retain the right to public hearings on any questions of public safty.  
No exemptions be granted for domestic conversion.

Sincerely yours,

/s/

Kayleen Kott, Chair  
University of California  
Student Body Presidents' Council

enclosed: SBPC resolution 8/18/84