

**NE585**  
**NUCLEAR FUEL CYCLES**  
**Front end of the nuclear fuel cycle**  
**3**

R. A. Borrelli

University of Idaho



**University of Idaho**  
Department of Nuclear Engineering  
and Industrial Management

Idaho Falls Center for Higher Education

# Learning objectives

Demonstrating how the nuclear fuel cycle is an holistic system

Explaining why the nuclear fuel cycle is what it is

Apply principle of SWU

Model a nominal solvent extraction system

Model enrichment processes

Demonstrate principles of enrichment and conversion

Some of Chapter 4 in the book

Check out [Pandora's promise](#) if it's still on Netflix

There's a lot of pictures here

# Learning nodes

Nuclear fuel cycle overview

Locations of current domestic fleet

Plant closures

Nuclear power around the world

Planned construction

Components of the nuclear fuel cycle

Mining

Milling

Conversion

Enrichment

Separative Work Unit (SWU)

Fuel fabrication

Macro reactor operation

CP-1

Hanford B reactor

EBR-I

EBR-II

TREAT

Military use

Reactor concepts

Generations

PWR

BWR

CANDU

Aqueous reprocessing

# More learning nodes

## **Enrichment**

History

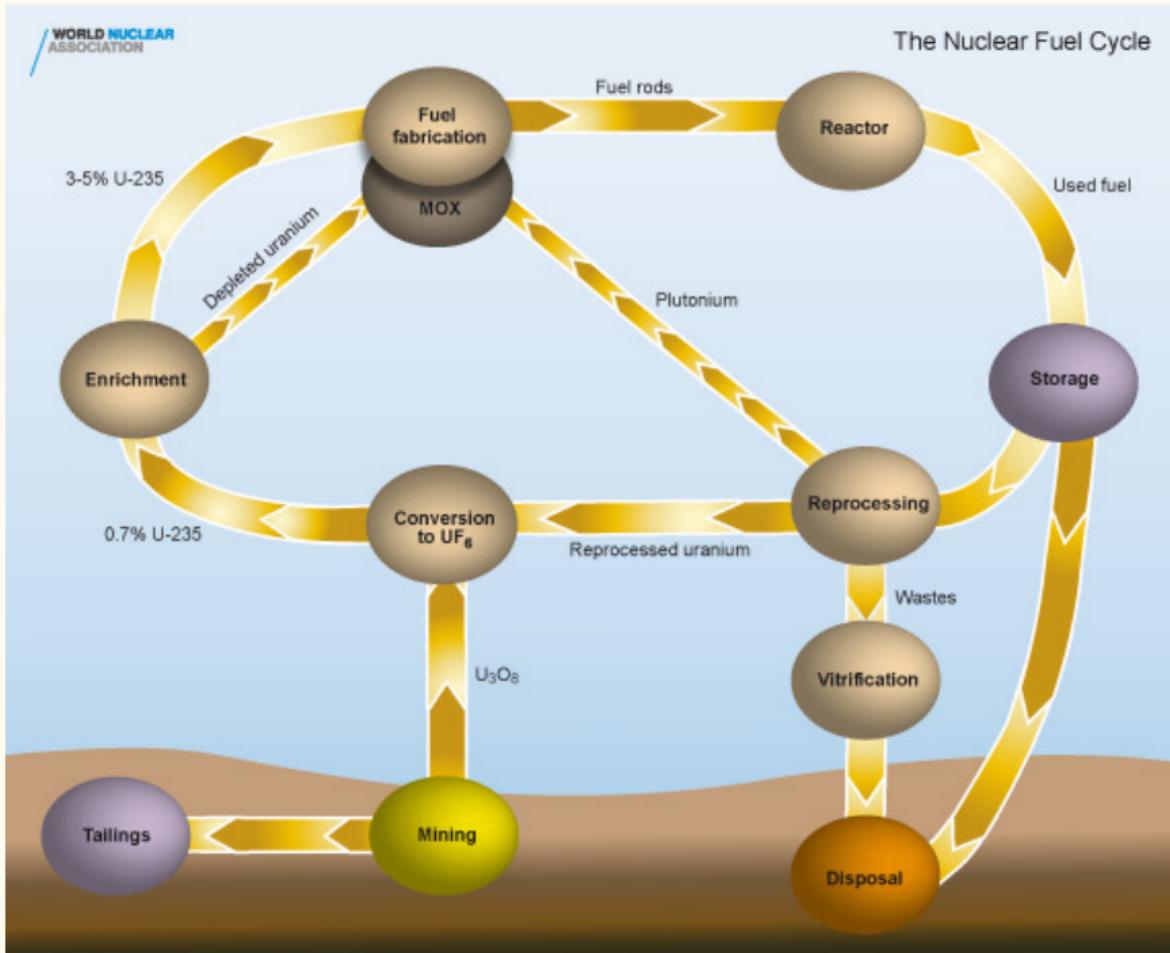
Processing

Tails

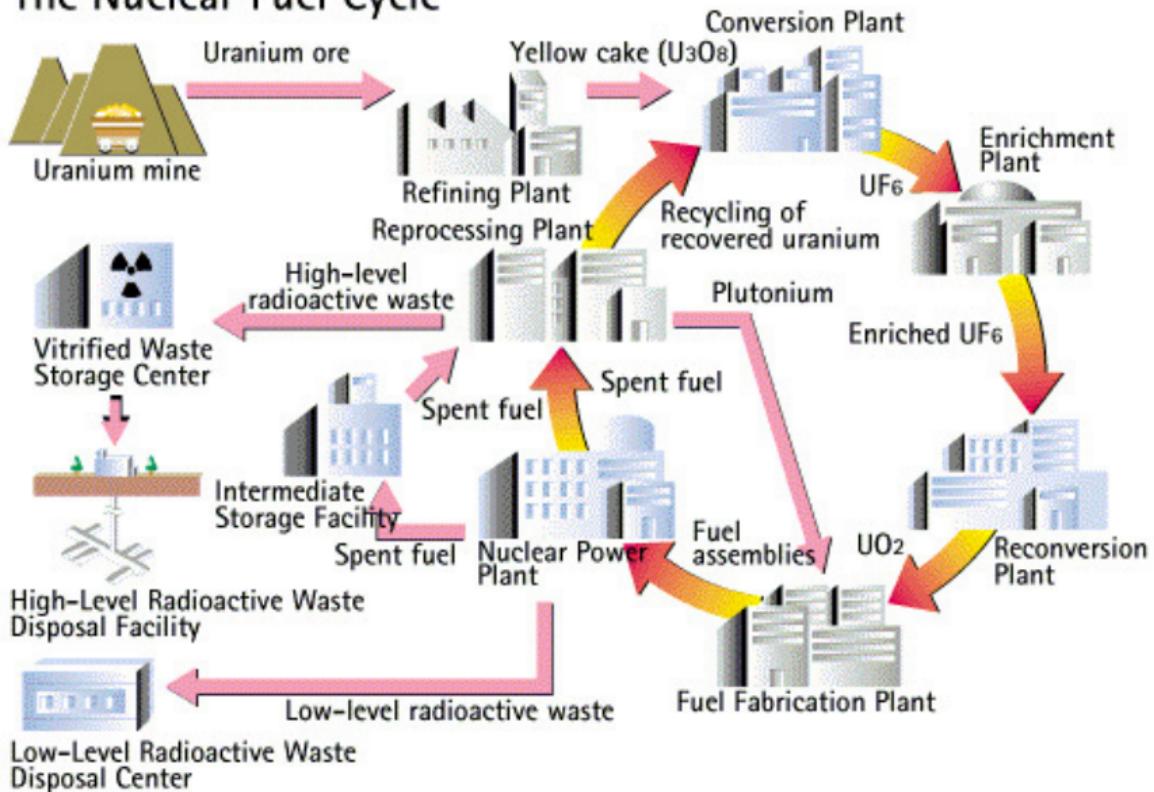
## **Conversion**

Processing

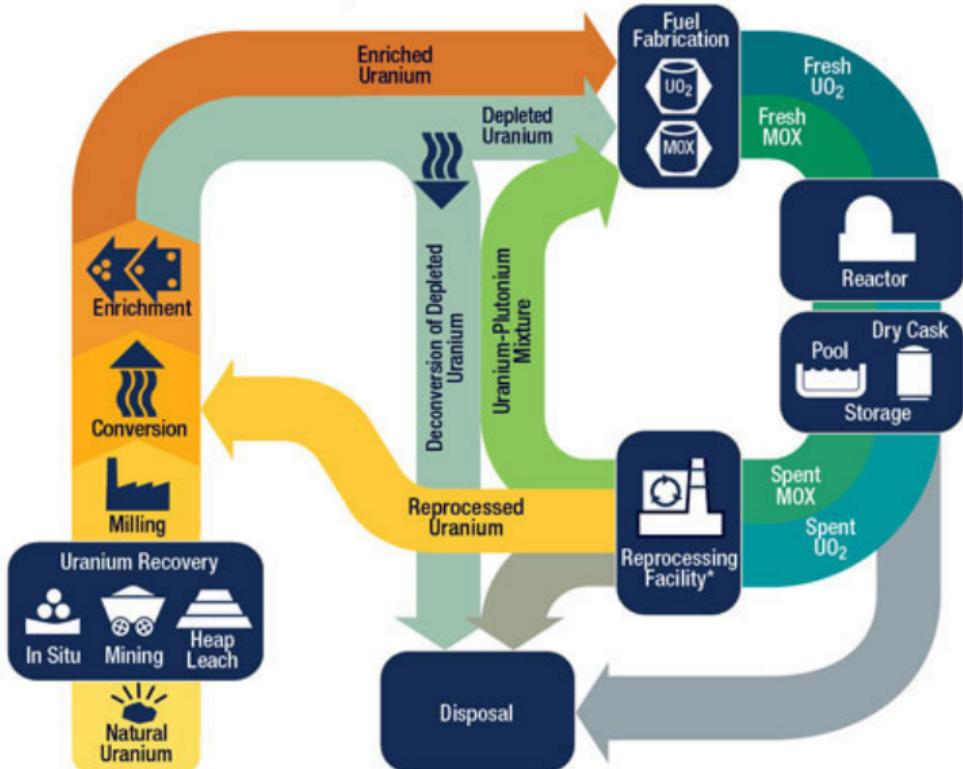
# **Nuclear fuel cycle overview**



# The Nuclear Fuel Cycle



# The Nuclear Fuel Cycle



\* Reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel, including mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel, is not practiced in the United States.

Note: The NRC has no regulatory role in mining uranium.

As of January 2019

# Look at the fuel cycle as systems engineering

Mining

Making the fuel (saw Areva plant in Richland)

What a reactor does and the different kinds

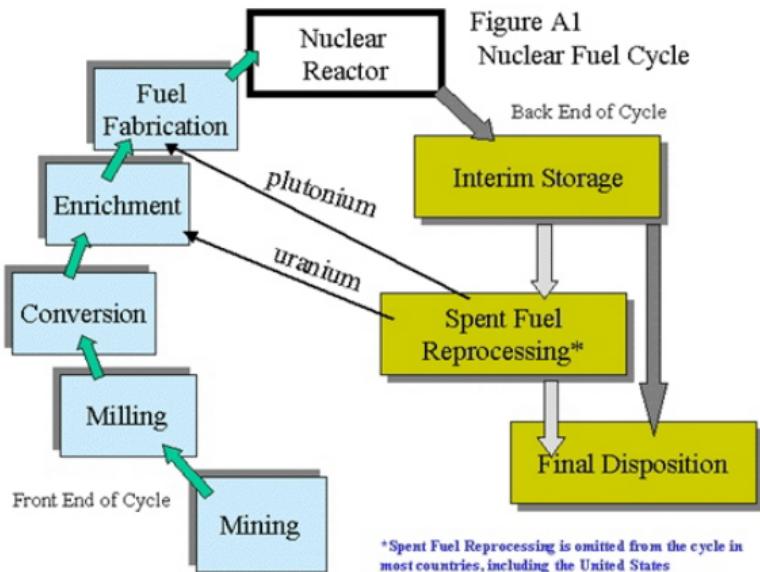
Recycling (what kinds and how)

Back-end management (storage and disposal)

The fuel cycle has a lot of technical but institutional issues too

How are they functionally dependent?

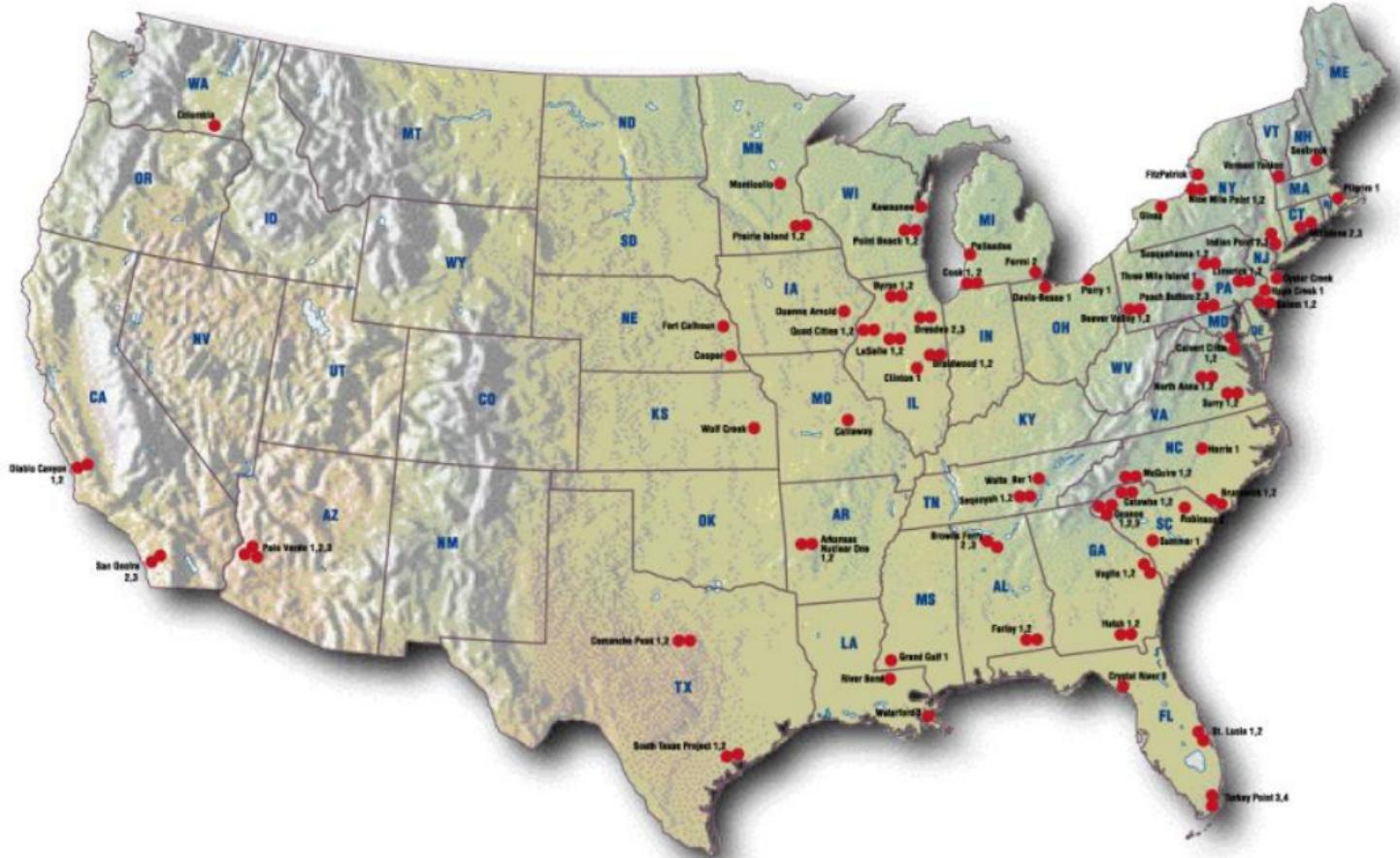
The fuel used in the commercial reactors is  $UO_2$  or  $(Pu + U)O_2$



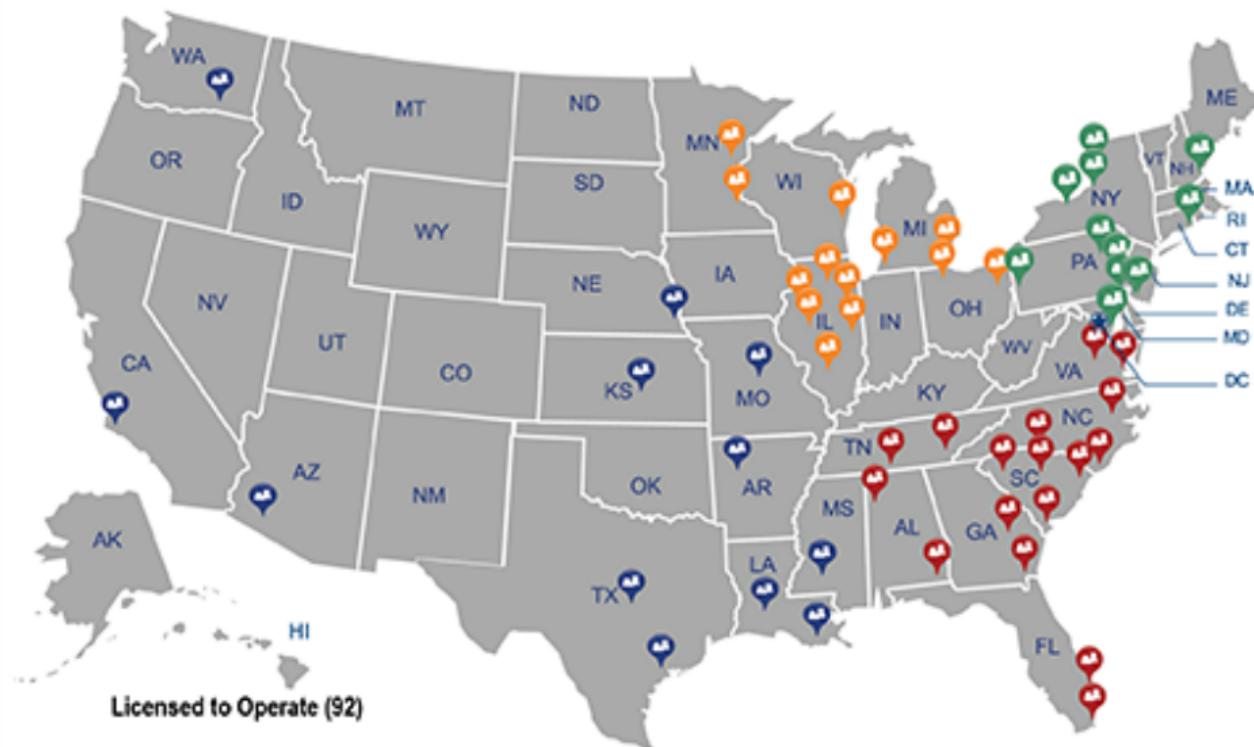
**Front end** – Making the fuel and putting it in the reactor

**Back end** – What happens when you take it out of the reactor

## **Locations of current domestic fleet**



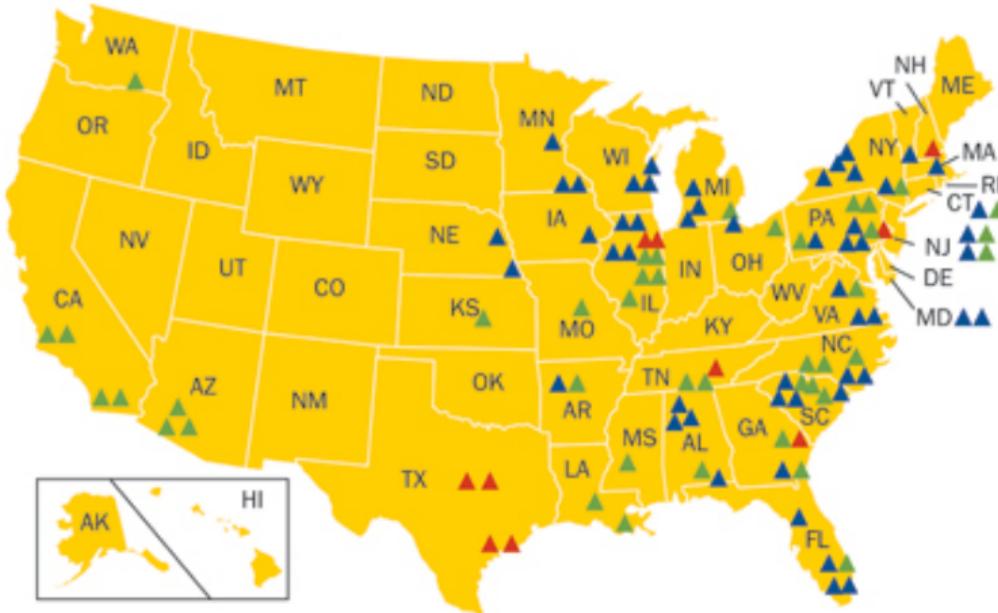
## U.S. Operating Commercial Nuclear Power Reactors



Source: U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission - As of February 2023

# **NRC** **list of power reactor units**

## U.S. Commercial Nuclear Power Reactors—Years of Operation



Source: U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

# **Plant closures**

# Losing Power: Prospects Dimming for U.S. Nuclear Plants

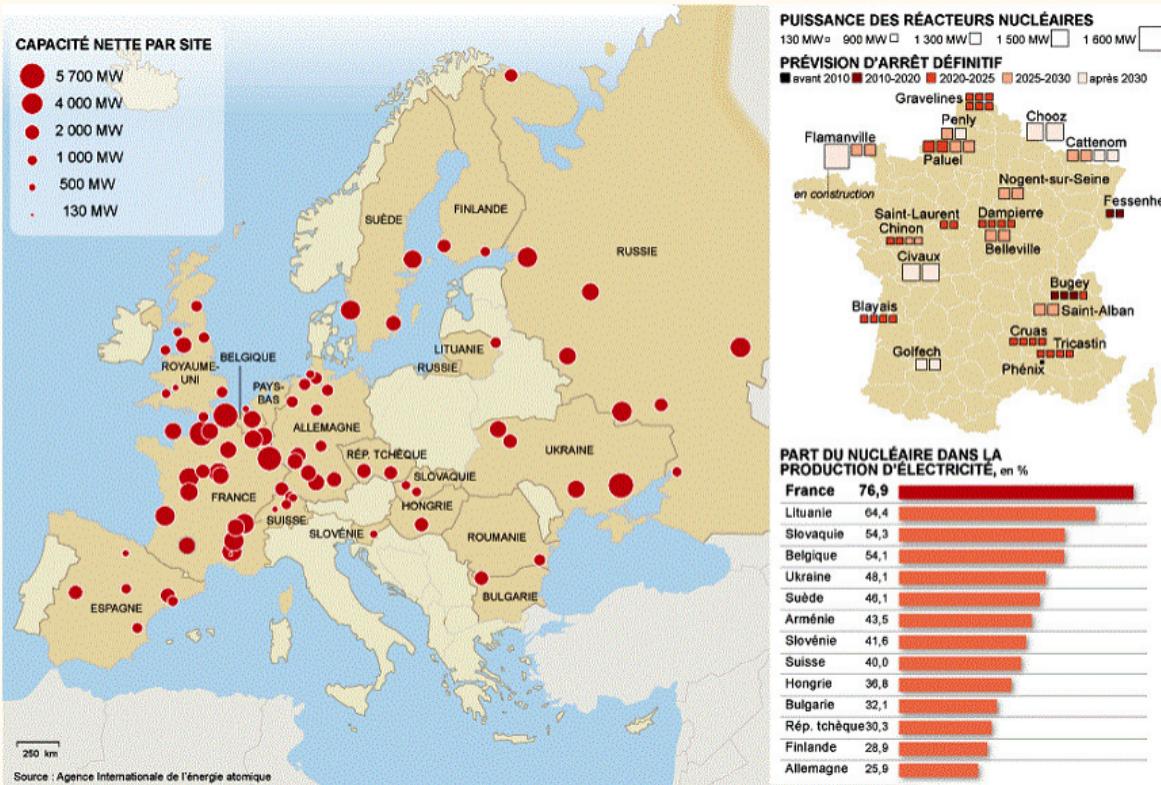
Four companies announced nuclear plant closures in 2013 — representing the first shutdowns in 15 years and an unprecedented single-year retrenchment for the U.S. nuclear industry. Experts say at least ten other plants could be forced to close because of low power prices, rising costs and other woes.



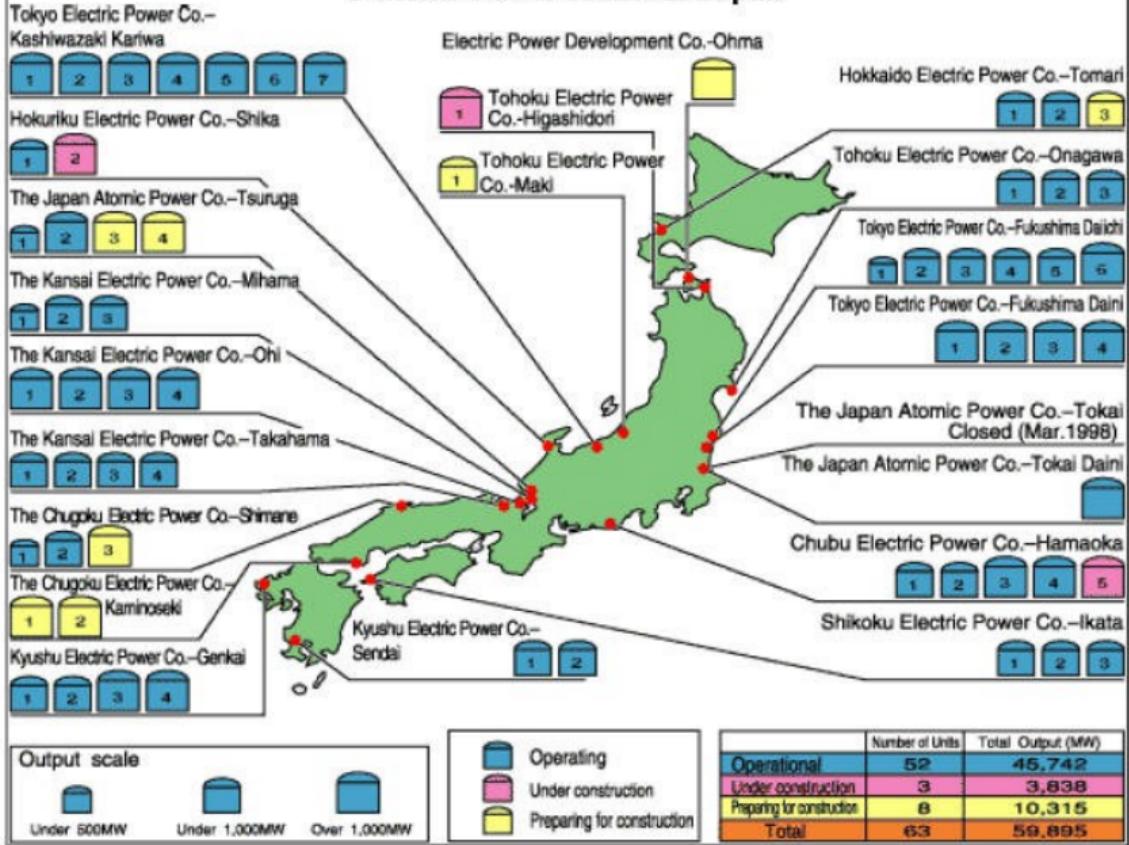
SOURCES: Nuclear Regulatory Commission; Mark Cooper, Vermont Law School; Google Maps; InsideClimate News research

PAUL HORN / InsideClimate News

**Let's look at other nations**



## Nuclear Power Plants in Japan



# Where are they going to dispose of everything?



# Same problem

EJA Infographics ①

## 국내 핵발전소 운영 및 건설 현황\* (Nuclear power plants' operation and construction in South Korea)

- 운영 중 핵발전소  
(Operational NPPs)  
21기|(Units)|18,716MW
- 건설 중 핵발전소  
(Under construction NPPs)  
7기|(Units)|8,600MW
- 계획 중 핵발전소  
(Planning NPPs)  
67기|(Units)|8,600MW

영광(Younggwang)
#1 1986.08.25. 950
#2 1987.06.10. 950
#3 1995.03.31. 1000
#4 1996.01.01. 1000
#5 2002.05.21. 1000
#6 2002.12.24. 1000



상업운전개시일 / 용량(MW)  
Commercial Operation / Capacity (MW)

울진(Ulchin)
#1 1988.09.10. 950
#2 1989.09.30. 950
#3 1998.08.11. 1000
#4 1999.12.31. 1000
#5 2004.07.29. 1000
#6 2005.04.22. 1000

신울진(Shin-Ulchin)
#1 (2016.06) 1400
#2 (2017.06) 1400
#3 (2020.06) 1400
#4 (2021.06) 1400

월성(Wolsong)
#1 1983.04.22. 679
#2 1997.07.01. 700
#3 1998.07.01. 700
#4 1999.10.01. 700

신월성(Shin-Wolsong)
#1 (2012.03) 1000
#2 (2013.01) 1000
#3 **
#4 **

고리(Kori)
#1 1978.04.29. 587***
#2 1983.07.25. 650
#3 1985.09.30. 950
#4 1986.04.29. 950

신고리(Shin-Kori)
#1 2011.02.28. 1000
#2 (2011.12) 1000
#3 (2013.09) 1400
#4 (2014.09) 1400
#5 (2018.12) 1400
#6 (2019.12) 1400
#7 (2022.06) 1500
#8 (2023.06) 1500

- \* 제5차 전력수급계획(2010~2024)을 바탕으로 에너지정책의행동이 작성 (2011.8. 현재)
- \*\* Energy Justice Actions created, based on The 5th Basic Plan of Long-Term Electricity Supply and Demand(2010-2024). (Aug. 2011)
- \*\* 신월성 3,4호기 부지로 선정되었으나, 중저준위 핵폐기장으로 용도 변경.
- \*\* This site was decided as the Shin-wolsong #3,#4 site, but as a change of intermediate nuclear waste dump site.
- \*\*\* 설계 수명(30년)이 완료되었으나, 정부 승인으로 10년 수명연장.(2008년 1월 17일)
- \*\*\* Design life(30 years) had been completed, but government approved life extension, for 10 years. (17 January 2008)



## **Planned construction**

# **Components of the nuclear fuel cycle**

# **Mining**

We have to find uranium first  $U_3O_8$

## The Nuclear Fuel Cycle

### International Mining



Extract the ore from the ground

What do you do if you don't have it?

Check out Australia

# **Milling**

# Uranium ore is refined by milling

The ore contains  $UO_2$ ,  $UO_3$  and other heavy metal oxides

Usually using solvents to leach it from the ground

Then it is chemically treated to obtain 'yellowcake'

Lots of contaminated scrap is produced though (mill tailings)

Usually dumped as sludge in ponds (lots)

Radioisotopes (radon), heavy metals, chemicals, etc.

We have plenty of uranium resources

But what if we decide it is too harmful to mine?

# **Conversion**

$U_3O_8$  is converted to  $UF_6$  prior to enrichment

Mined U contains  $^{234}U$ ,  $^{235}U$ ,  $^{238}U$ , .0054%, .72%

Because it is a gas at not so high temperature which is easier for enrichment

# **Enrichment**

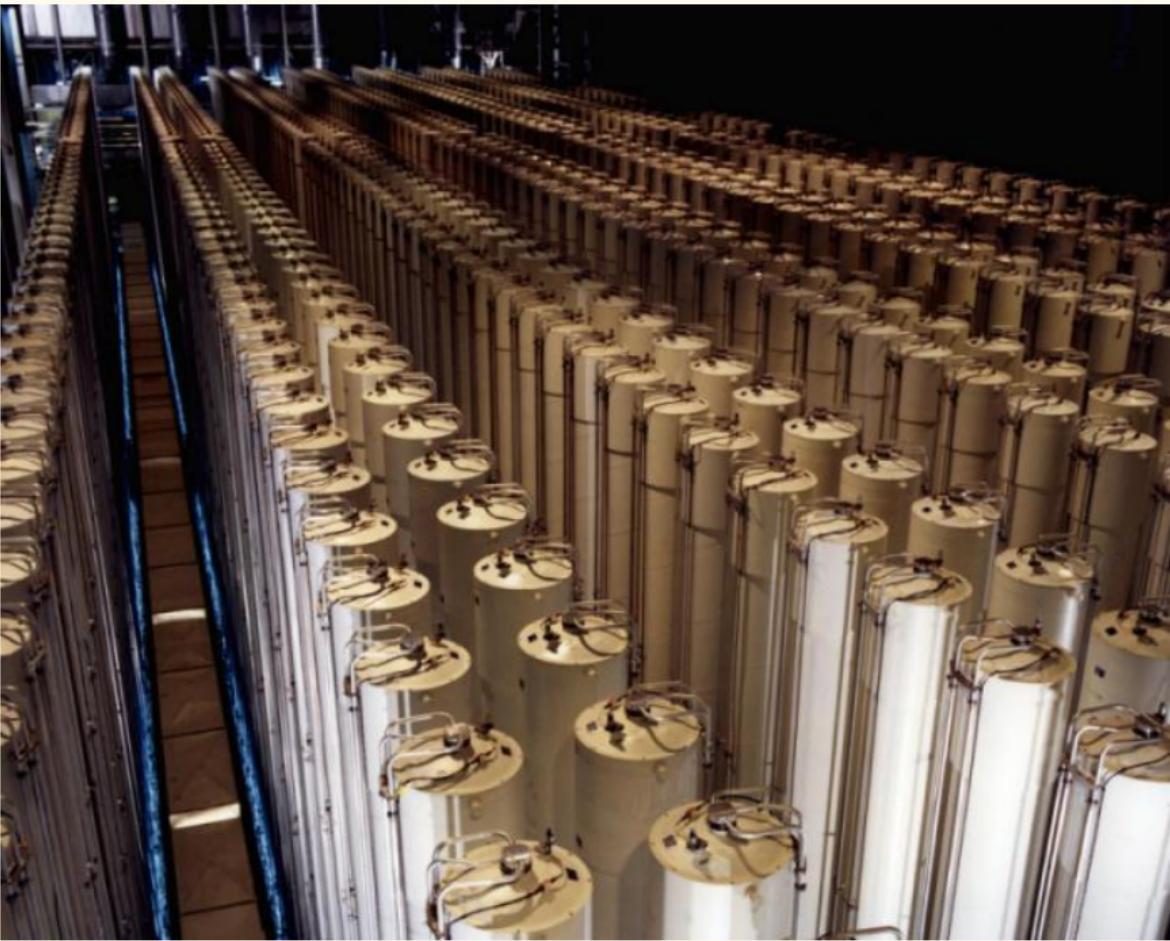
$UF_6$  gas is then enriched with  $^{235}U$

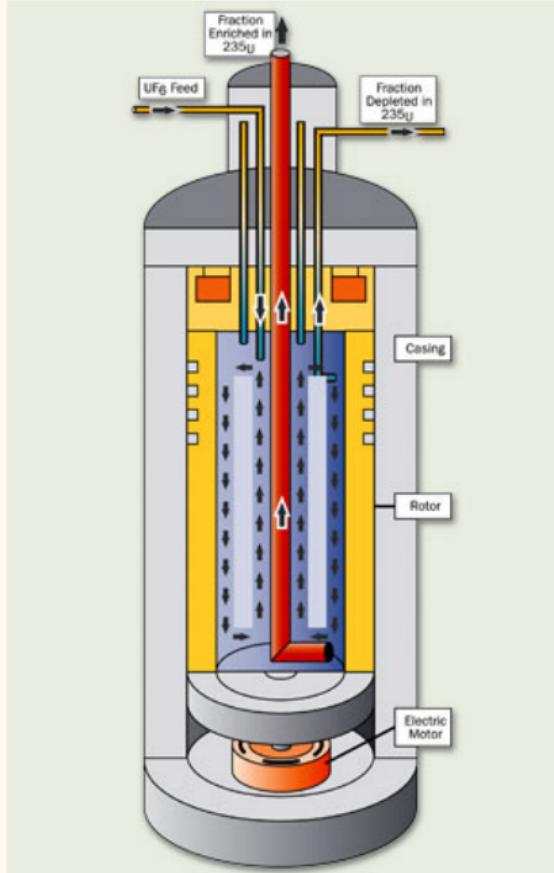
Enriched to 3% to 5%

The byproduct is depleted uranium DU

Used for armor and bullets

Any idea why?





# **Separative Work Unit (SWU)**

SWU is the **amount of work** to enrich uranium from natural abundance to reactor/weapon grade

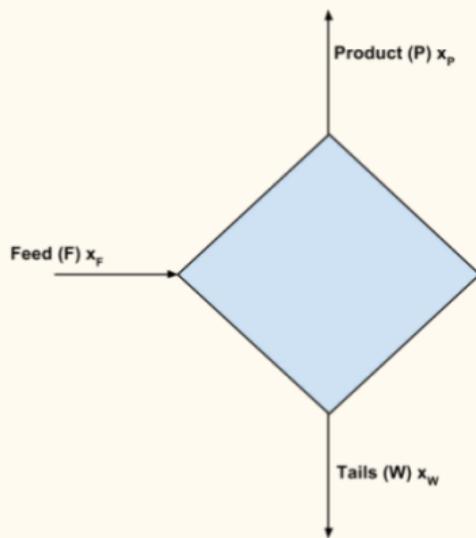
Dumb acronyms are why people hate nuclear

$$x_F = 0.0072 \quad (1)$$

$$x_P = 0.03 - 0.05 \quad (2)$$

$$x_W = 0.0002 - 0.0003 \quad (3)$$

Amount of feed for target product increases linearly with  $x_P$  by mass conservation



$$F = P + W \quad (4)$$

$$F \cdot x_F = P \cdot x_P + W \cdot x_W \quad (5)$$

## SWU measures thermodynamic work to separate isotopes

SWU has units of kg because of course it does

Separation potential is a measure of differences in Gibbs free energy

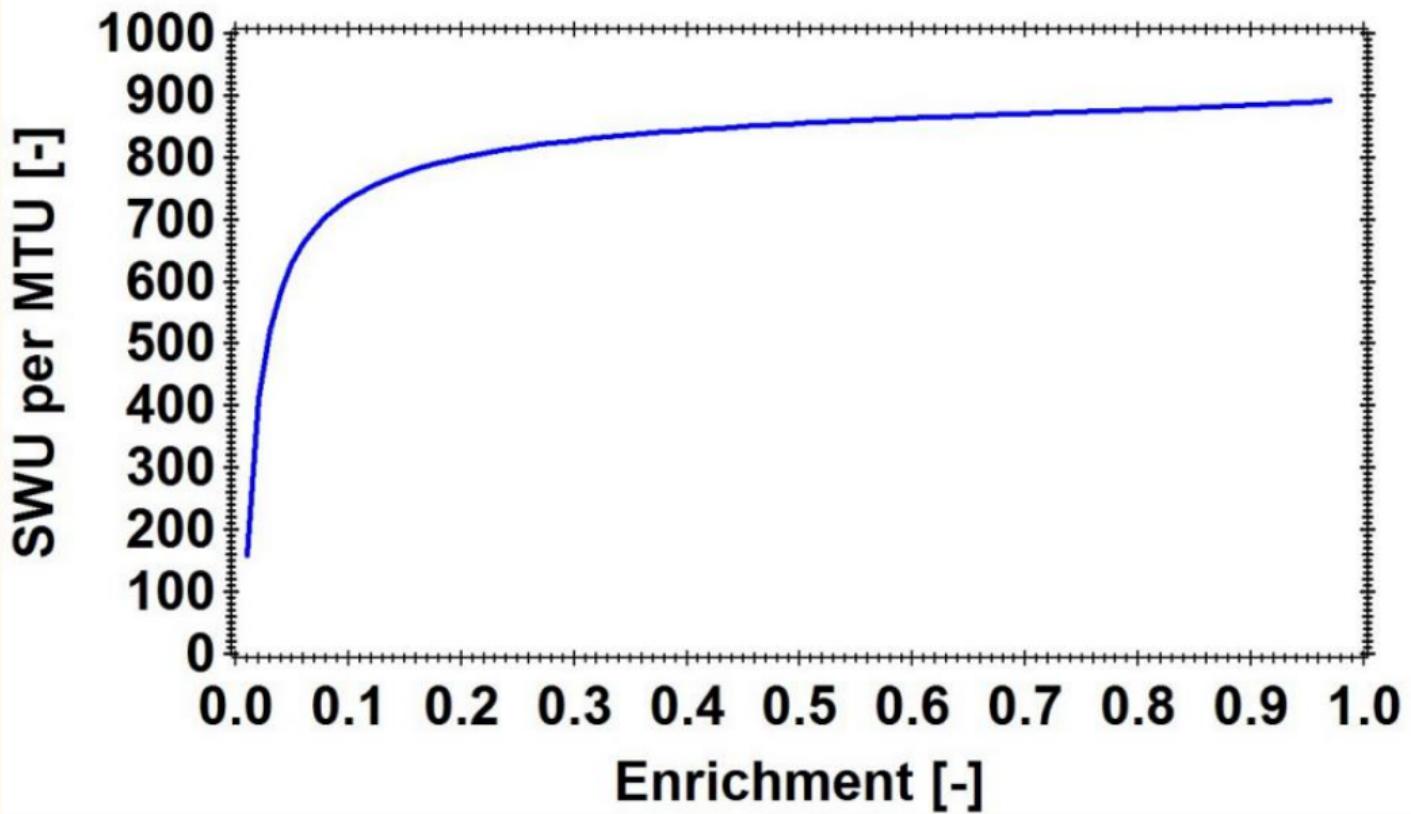
$$SWU \equiv [P \cdot V(x_P) + W \cdot V(x_W)] - F \cdot V(x_F) \quad (6)$$

$$V(x_i) \equiv (2x_i - 1) \cdot \ln \frac{x_i}{1 - x_i} \quad (7)$$

$$\frac{SWU}{P} = V(x_P) + \frac{W}{P} V(x_W) - \frac{F}{P} V(x_F) \quad (8)$$

The derivation is based on entropy changes

Change in entropy in **binary mixture of gases**



# **Fuel Fabrication**

# The fuel fabrication process (LWRs) makes ceramic $UO_2$ pellets

Why ceramic?

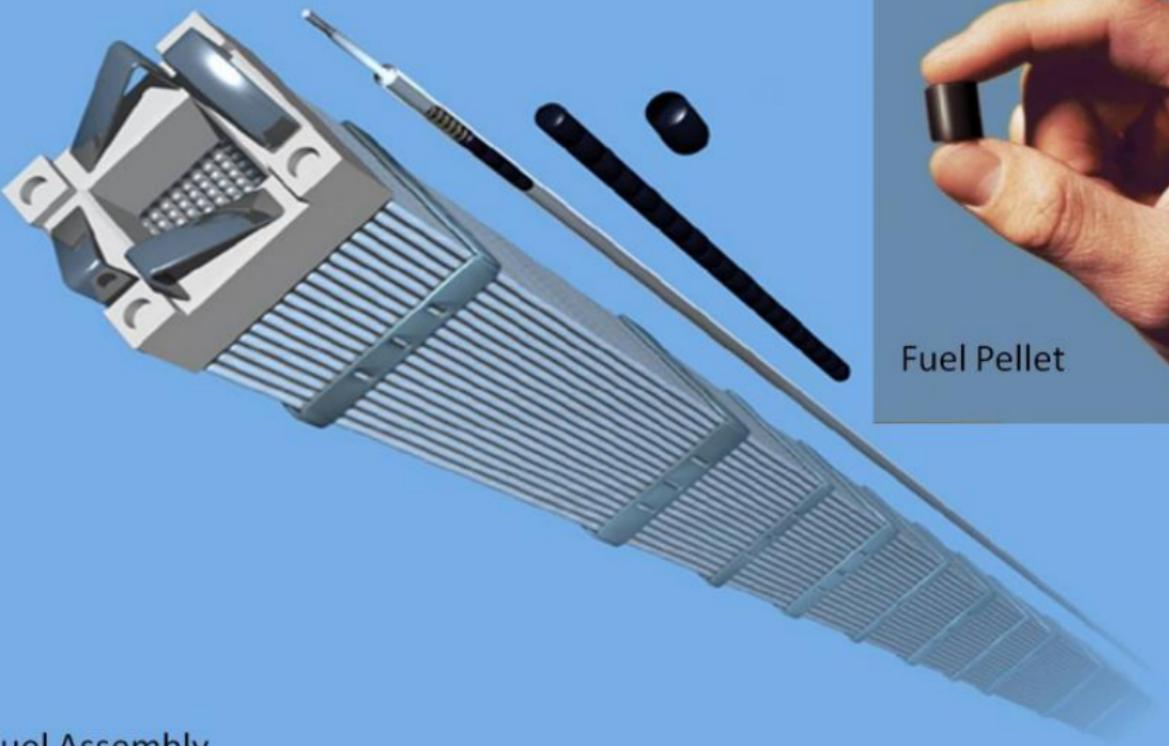
Is there anything better?

Fuel rods contain a Zr-based alloy

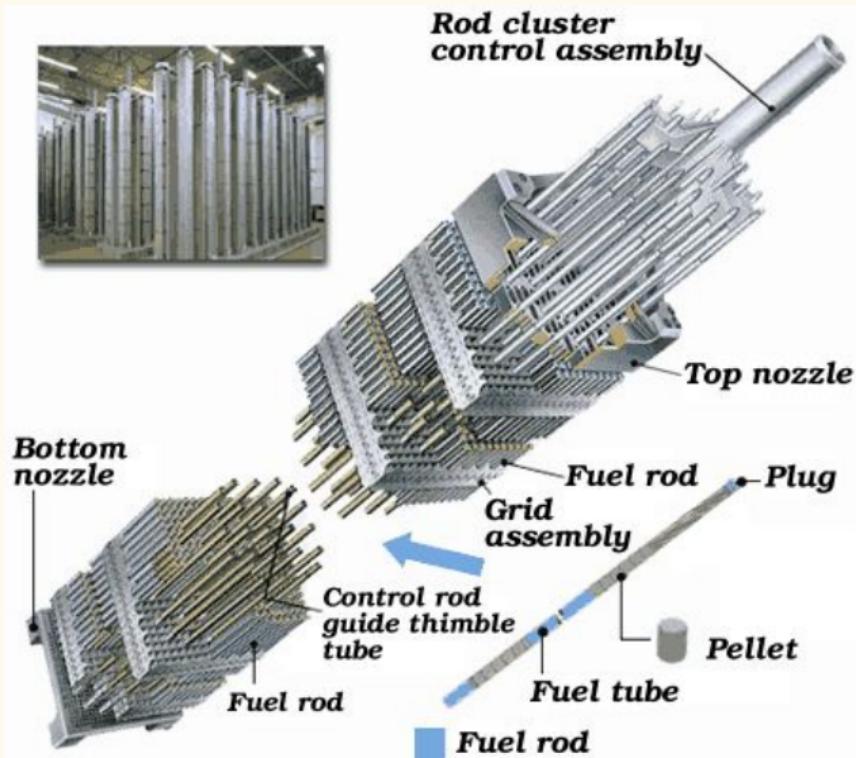
Also generates hydrogen gas



That's kind of what happened at Fukushima



Fuel Assembly



**BWR/6 FUEL  
ASSEMBLIES  
& CONTROL  
ROD MODULE**

- 1.TOP FUEL GUIDE  
2.CHANNEL  
FASTENER  
3.UPPER TIE  
PLATE  
4.EXPANSION  
SPACER  
5.LOCKING TAB  
6.CHANNEL  
7.CONTROL ROD  
8.FUEL ROD  
9.SPACER  
10.CORE SUPPORT  
ASSEMBLY  
11 LOWER  
TIE PLATE  
12.FUEL SUPPORT  
PIECE  
13.FUEL PELLET  
14-END PLUG  
15 CHANNEL  
SPACER  
16.PLENUM  
SPRING

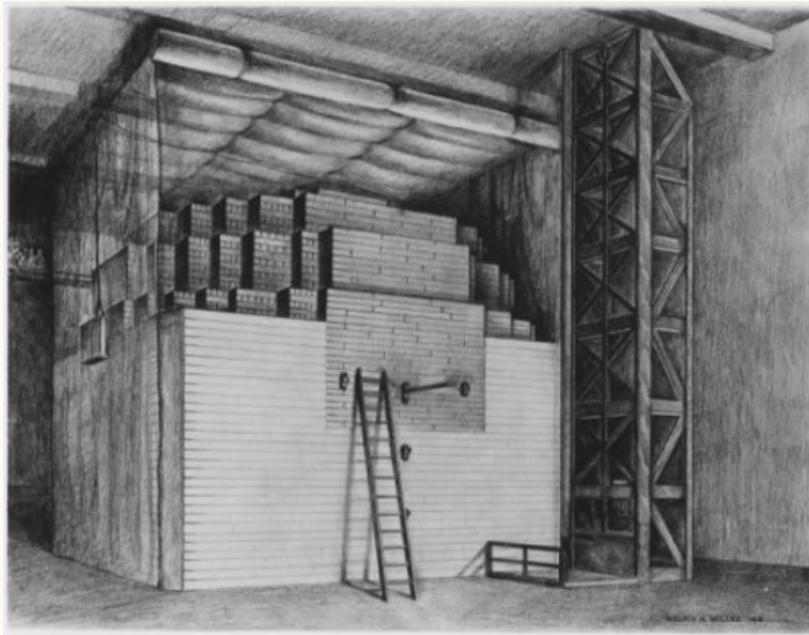
GENERAL  ELECTRIC



# **Macro reactor operation**

# **Chicago Pile-1 (CP-1)**

The first man made reactor was constructed at University of Chicago  
in 1942

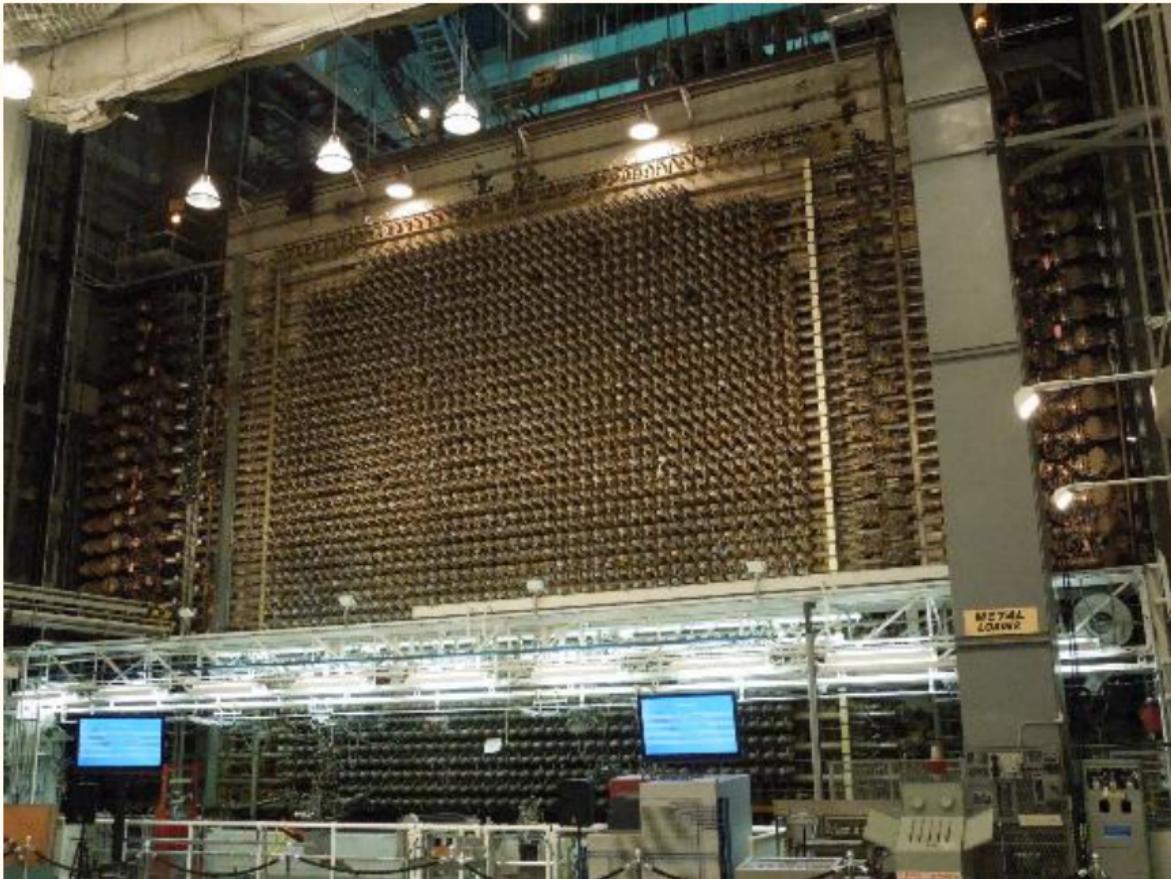


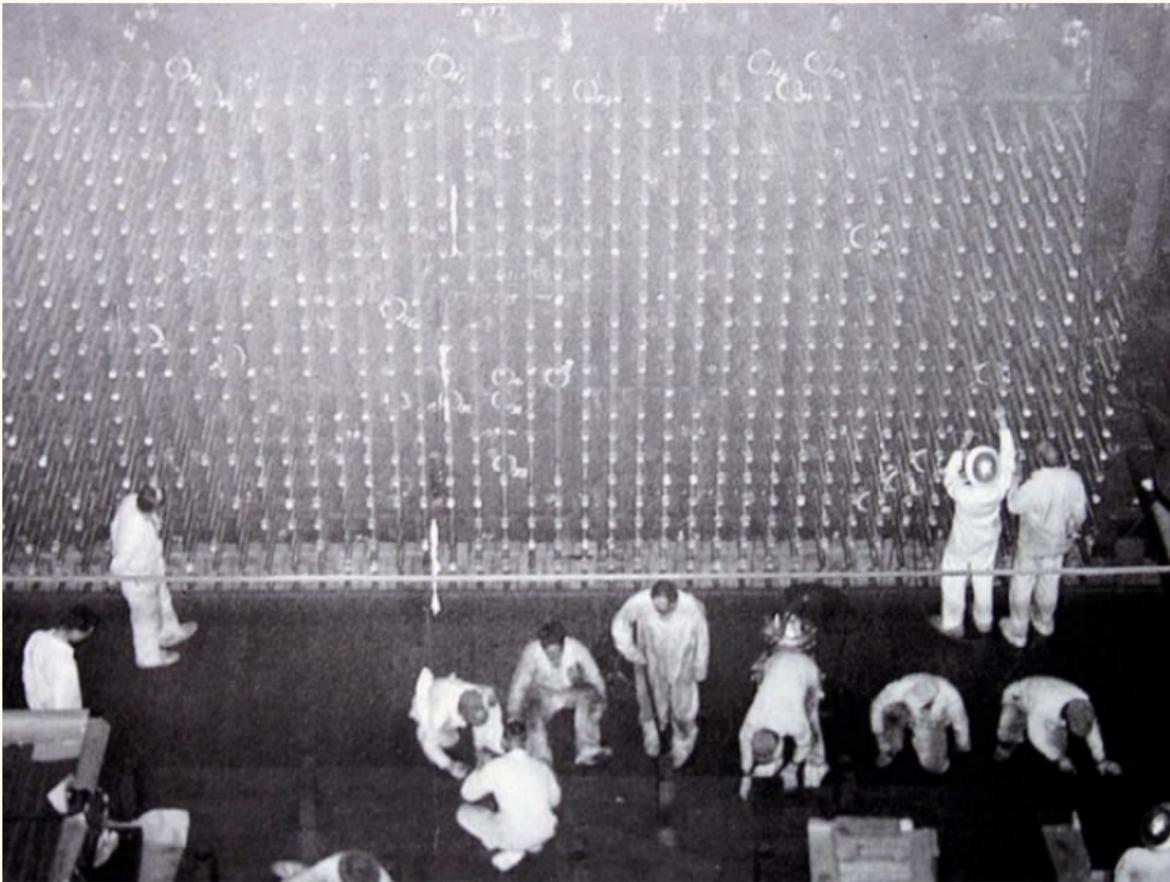
Made of uranium and graphite blocks

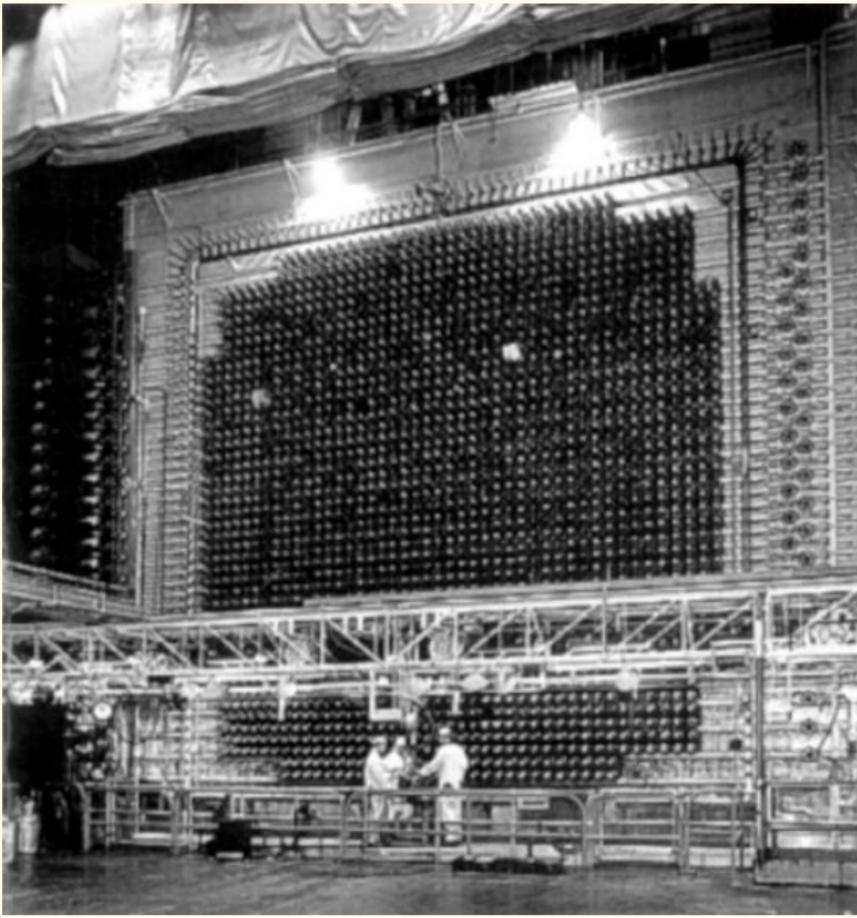
Cadmium coated rods

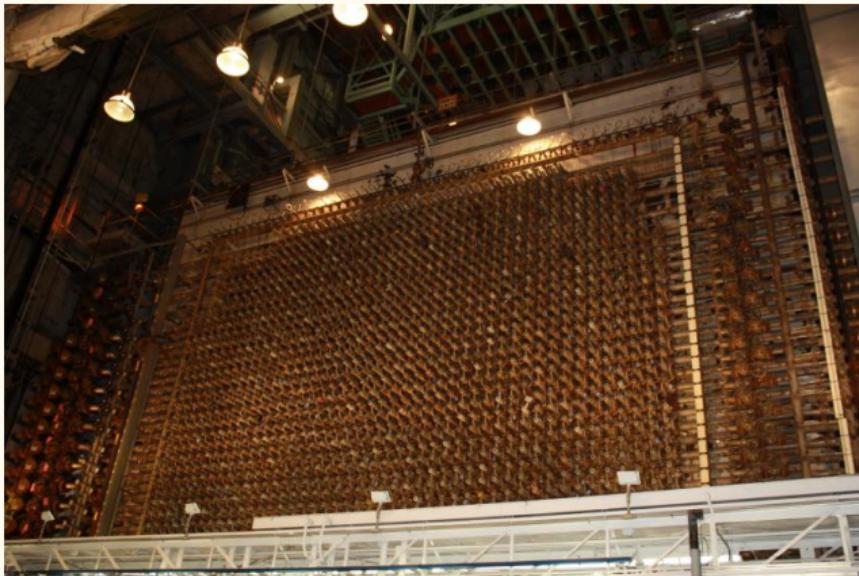
And I have a piece of the graphite

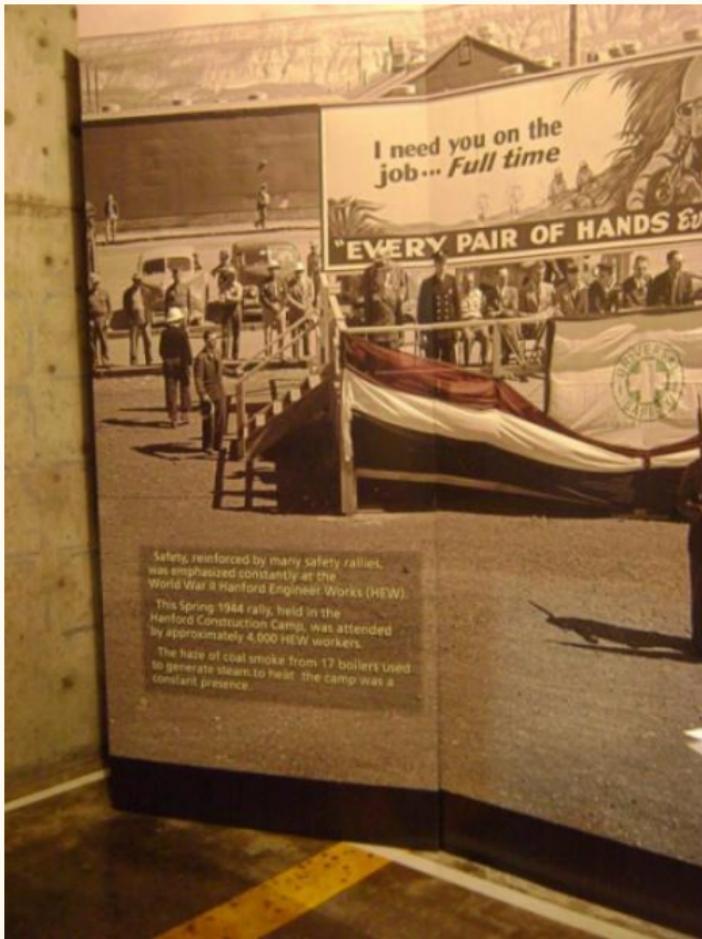
**Let's look at pictures of the Hanford B reactor**  
**Same design as CP1**











**EXTRA The Villager EXTRA**

VILLAGE 2 Second Edition Works Business, Washington Times, Paper & Oil

# PEACE!

## OUR BOMB CLINCHED IT!

### Plant Will Not Close!

The Hanford Engineer Works will not close! It will continue operating indefinitely! Such was the statement announced from the offices of Collier P. F. Matthiessen, Area Engineers, and W. O. Simon, Plant Project Manager.

With the end of the war, project workers are entitled to a period of rest and recuperation. The plan they bring in bringing the war to a close is quick. Col. Matthiessen said, "But workers will go on to produce in the interest of peace." He added, "We are anxious to keep the plant open in the operation of the production of atomic bombs."

"Our work will go on indefinitely," he said. "We have no plans to close down. We are not going to rest for months. The present situation does not call for such a move. We have no desire to do this but I've never done it."

Mr. Simon has planned and is discussing an official meeting to be held at the plant to discuss the future of the plant. He stated that the company has no plans to close down the plant or to lay off workers regardless of the war, and that the plant will continue to operate in the interest of peace.

He also stated that the company has no plans to disband, at least in the near future. He said that the plant will remain open for the safety and welfare of the people of the Columbia River area.

"Our Bomb" Does the Job

How little is left to say about the atomic bomb? The first atomic bomb ever exploded was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, Hiroshima being the second largest city in Japan. The bomb was dropped by the B-52 bomber, B-52 bomber being the largest bomber ever built.

The first atomic bomb ever exploded was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, Hiroshima being the second largest city in Japan. The bomb was dropped by the B-52 bomber, B-52 bomber being the largest bomber ever built.

The first atomic bomb ever exploded was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, Hiroshima being the second largest city in Japan. The bomb was dropped by the B-52 bomber, B-52 bomber being the largest bomber ever built.

(Continued on Page Two)

### Message from W. O. Simon

Post of W. O. Simon, V.P.  
Hanford Engineer Works  
Dear Sirs:  
With the armistice of Japan, the Hanford  
Engineer Works will now be required to  
make all arrangements for the continuation  
of its operations. The Hanford Engineer  
Works has been engaged in the production  
of explosives for a period of time, and the  
continuation of its operations is in the interest  
of the safety and welfare of the people of the  
area.

Mr. Simon has planned and  
is discussing an official meeting to be held  
at the plant to discuss the future of the  
plant. He stated that the company has  
no plans to close down the plant or to lay off  
workers regardless of the war, and that the  
plant will continue to operate in the interest  
of peace.

He also stated that the company has  
no plans to disband, at least in the near  
future. He said that the plant will remain  
open for the safety and welfare of the  
people of the Columbia River area.

Mr. Simon has planned and  
is discussing an official meeting to be held  
at the plant to discuss the future of the  
plant. He stated that the company has  
no plans to close down the plant or to lay off  
workers regardless of the war, and that the  
plant will continue to operate in the interest  
of peace.

He also stated that the company has  
no plans to disband, at least in the near  
future. He said that the plant will remain  
open for the safety and welfare of the  
people of the Columbia River area.

He also stated that the company has  
no plans to disband, at least in the near  
future. He said that the plant will remain  
open for the safety and welfare of the  
people of the Columbia River area.

He also stated that the company has  
no plans to disband, at least in the near  
future. He said that the plant will remain  
open for the safety and welfare of the  
people of the Columbia River area.

(Continued on Page Two)

### Japs Surrender

(Oriental to THE RICHLAND VILLAGER)

WASHINGTON, D. C., Aug. 14.—FLASH  
President Truman signed the Japanese  
Government's proposal accepting Alli-  
ed terms as Hiroshima is prepared (quiet) to  
execute the atomic weapon (explosion) by Japanese  
and American General Headquarters of necessary  
terms for carrying out provisions of Potsdam  
Declaration (imperial).

General MacArthur, also prepared to issue  
memoranda to all Military, Naval and Air authorities  
of Japan and all forces under their control whenever  
the Japanese Government signs the instrument of surren-  
der and to issue such other orders as may be required  
by Supreme Commander of Allied Powers of execu-  
tive authority.

President Truman didn't say where surrender  
terms will be signed but it's been reported that new  
ones will take place aboard a battleship or of Okinawa.

Truman said arrangements being made for  
signing at earliest possible moment. The Presi-  
dent reading statement saying: "I do this reply  
full acceptance of Potsdam Declaration which I have  
been awaiting."

In the early hours of yesterday  
President Truman signed the Japanese  
Government's proposal accepting Alli-  
ed terms as Hiroshima is prepared (quiet) to  
execute the atomic weapon (explosion) by Japanese  
and American General Headquarters of necessary  
terms for carrying out provisions of Potsdam  
Declaration (imperial).

General MacArthur, also prepared to issue  
memoranda to all Military, Naval and Air authorities  
of Japan and all forces under their control whenever  
the Japanese Government signs the instrument of surren-  
der and to issue such other orders as may be required  
by Supreme Commander of Allied Powers of execu-  
tive authority.

General MacArthur, also prepared to issue  
memoranda to all Military, Naval and Air authorities  
of Japan and all forces under their control whenever  
the Japanese Government signs the instrument of surren-  
der and to issue such other orders as may be required  
by Supreme Commander of Allied Powers of execu-  
tive authority.

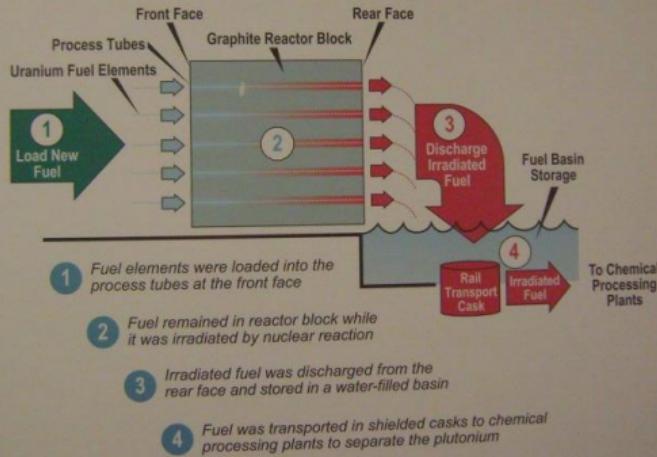
(Continued on Page Two)

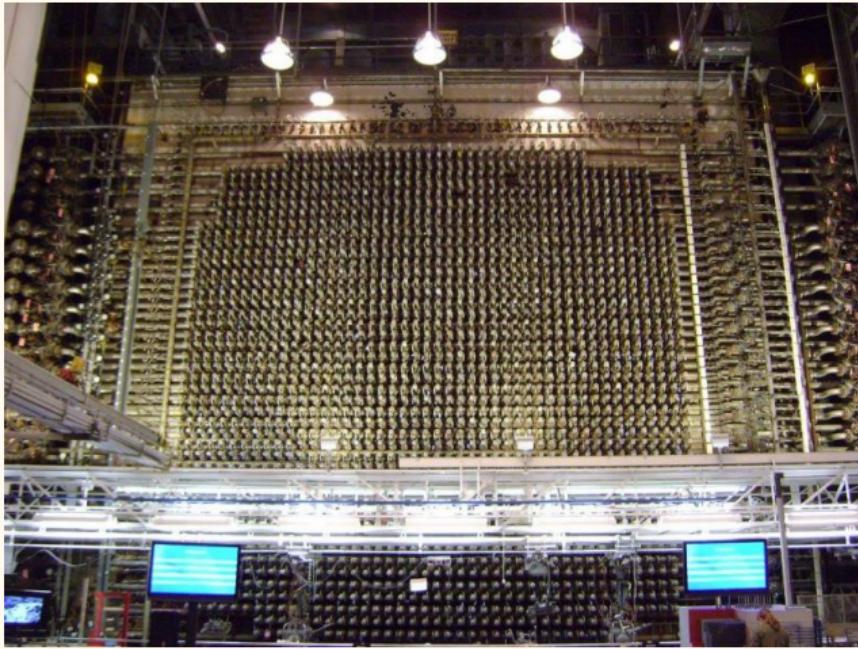




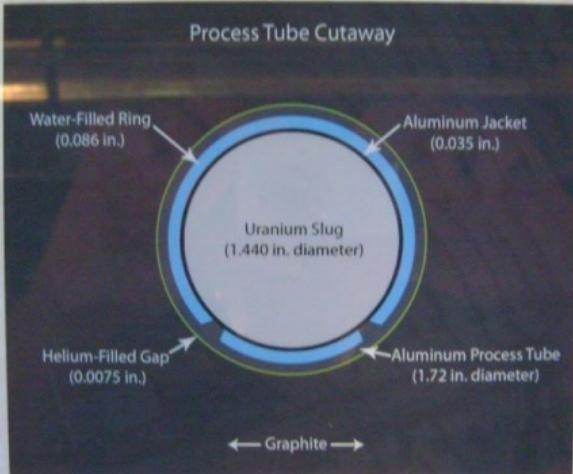
Hanford's Historic B Reactor

## Simplified Reactor Operation





I to the  
here it  
or large  
reactor  
puted to  
n to the  
forced  
or and  
ures no  
ntigrade



Be  
each  
time  
desp  
pass  
min  
rea  
the  
verti  
to a







5.3-68 Dr  
A. E. E.

10 R/HR

100 R/HR

1 R/HR

10 R/HR

# **Natural reactor**

## A natural reactor actually happened about 2 billion years ago

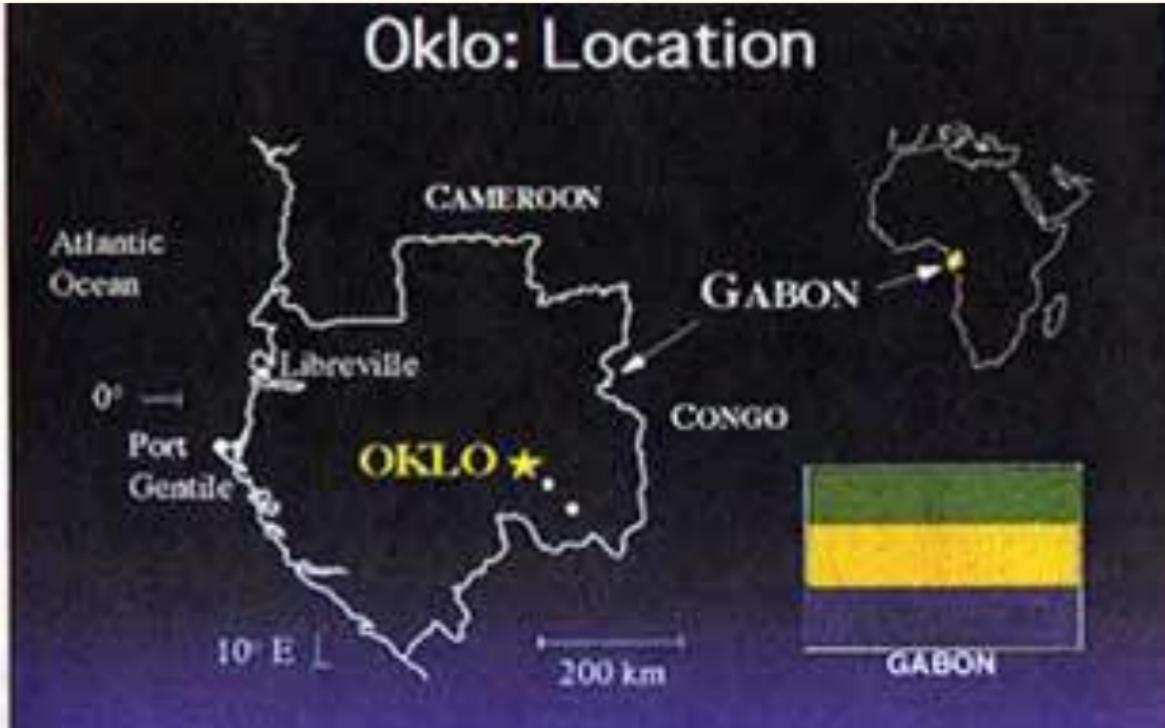
16 sites operated for about  $10^5$  years at 100 kW thermal

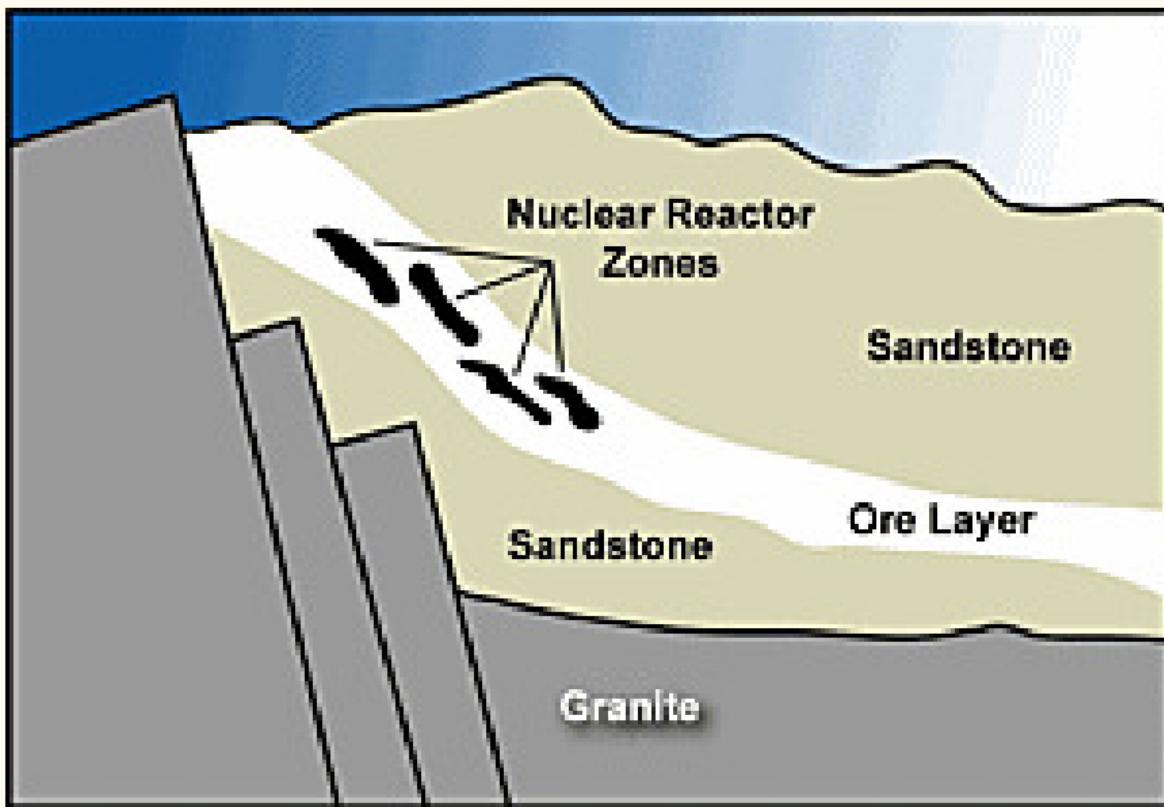
French company found samples of 0.60% of  $^{235}U$

How much is there normally?

Uranium rich mineral deposits were infiltrated by groundwater which served as moderator

# Oklo: Location





**EBR-I**

# EBR-I was the first reactor to generate electricity

In 1951 - now a museum, open to the public for free

About 200 kW of electricity

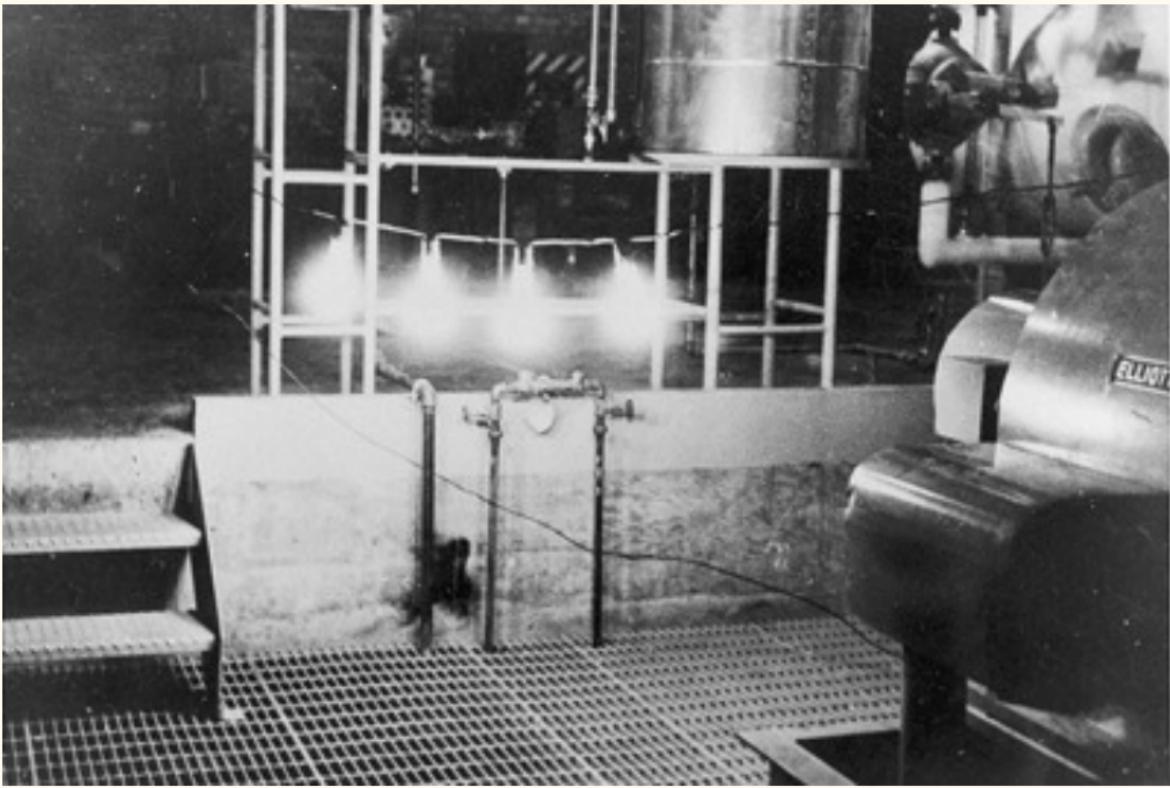
Also was a breeder and first to confirm Fermi's theory

'Fast' reactor, metal fuel and molten salt designs

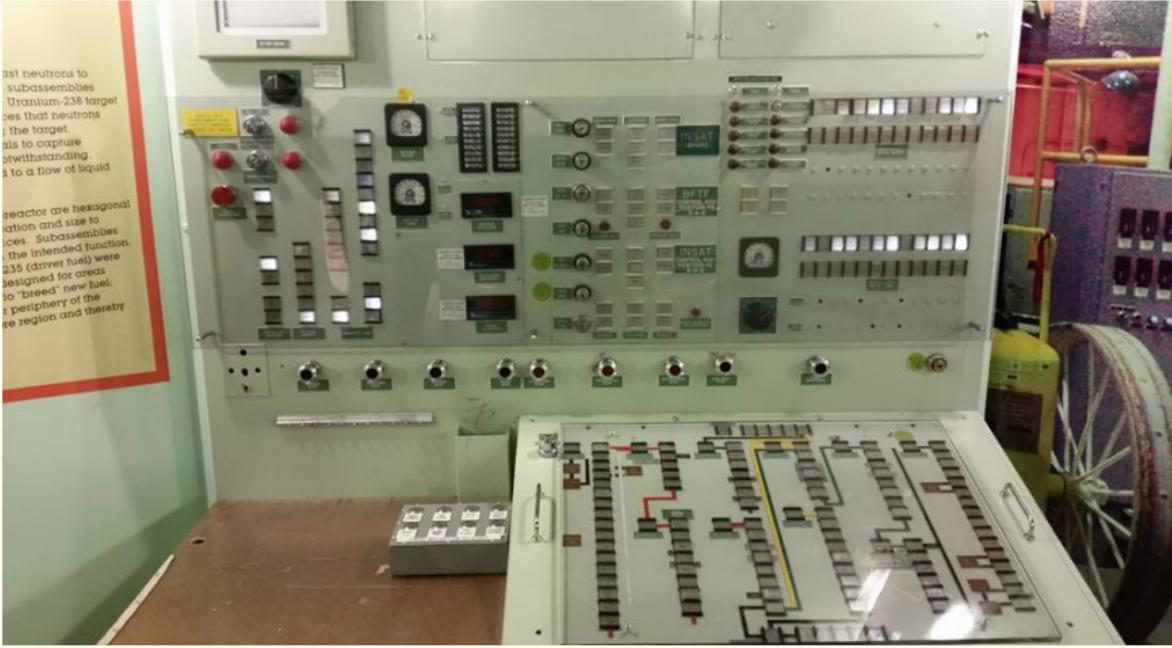
Then the commercial reactors switched to ceramic and water

Why?

Now the so called Generation IV reactor designs use metals and salts



**More pictures**







## The EBR-II Difference

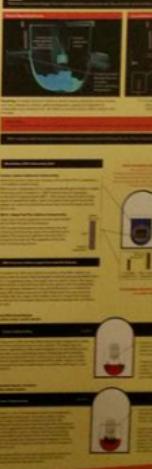
**The Accidents at Three Mile Island,  
Chernobyl and Japan would not have  
happened with EBR-II technology.**

In three decades of operation, EBR-II had proven that a nuclear reactor could be designed, built, and maintained to produce electricity on a large scale, to recycle and reuse its own spent fuel (while producing still more usable fuel), and to rely on the laws of nature to achieve emergency shutdown without posing a threat to workers, the environment, or the public.

In the end, however, the pioneering reactor fell victim to events far beyond the walls of its towering steel dome.

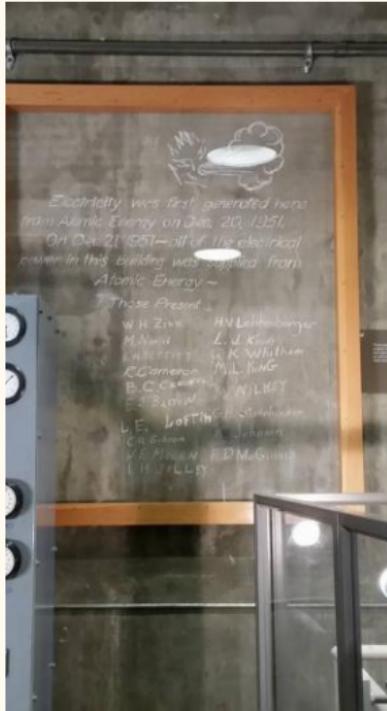
### Why is EBR-II world

There are only two nuclear-reactor cores active in the world today. The others have been closed down. These include ones that EBR-II would shut down.



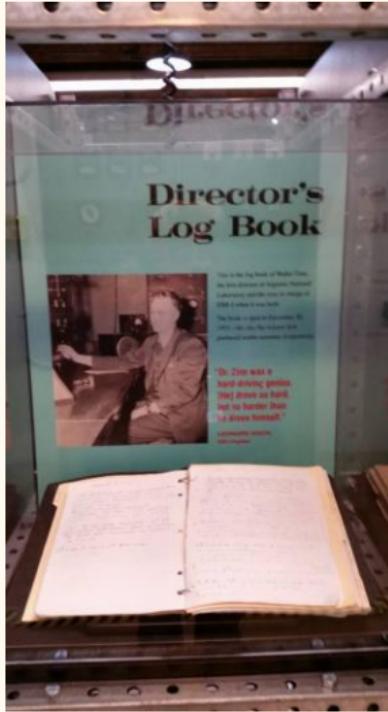


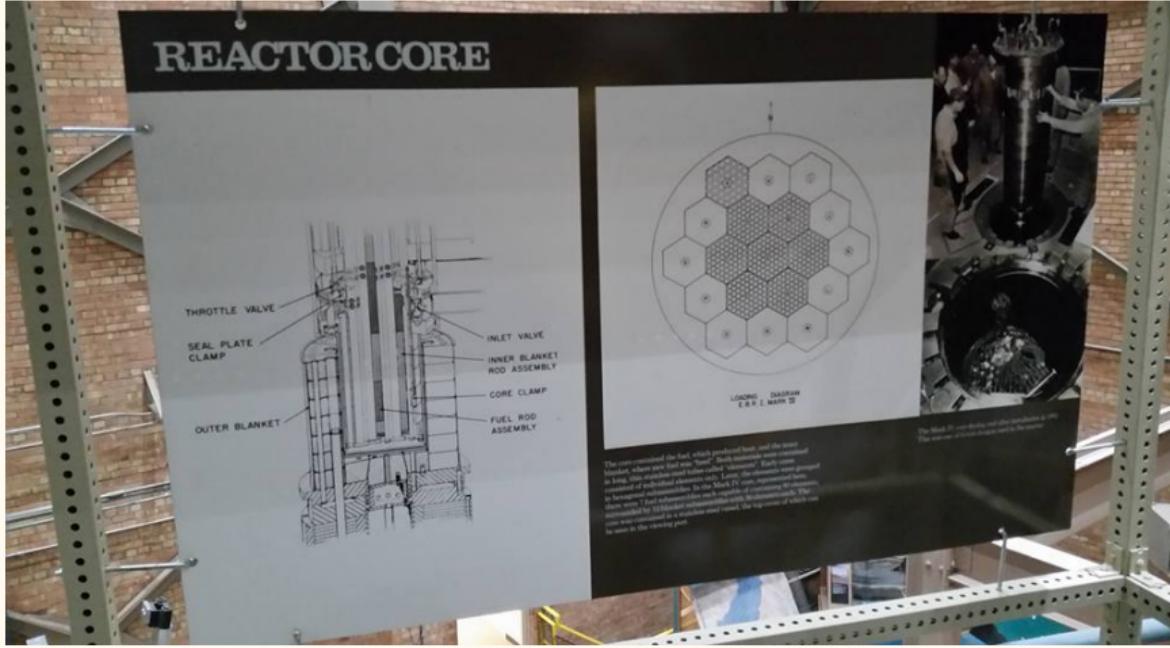
















## A NaK for Keeping Cool

You're looking at part of the EBR-I cooling system. These pipes carried an alloy of sodium (elemental symbol Na) and potassium (elemental symbol K), or NaK. Everyone called it "nack".

No one had used NaK as a coolant before. The reactor's designers chose it because it:

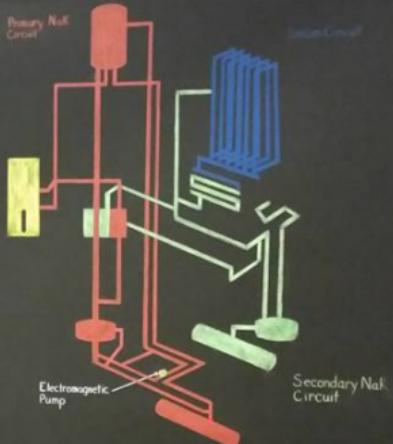
- Stays liquid over a wide range of temperatures - it doesn't boil away

- Transfers heat very efficiently - takes heat away from the reactor core, keeping it cool

- Allows neutrons from the reactor core to collide with the Uranium-238 in the breeding blanket and make more fuel

But NaK isn't perfect. It burns upon exposure to air or water and corrodes many materials. The designers had to invent new techniques and equipment, such as an electromagnetic pump that would keep the NaK circulating without moving parts.

This cooling system worked without fail for the life of the reactor.



"[With NaK] they were walking into a cutting edge, completely unknown technical situation...they handled it beautifully."

Leon Walters  
Argonne Laboratory senior technical advisor



**EBR-II**

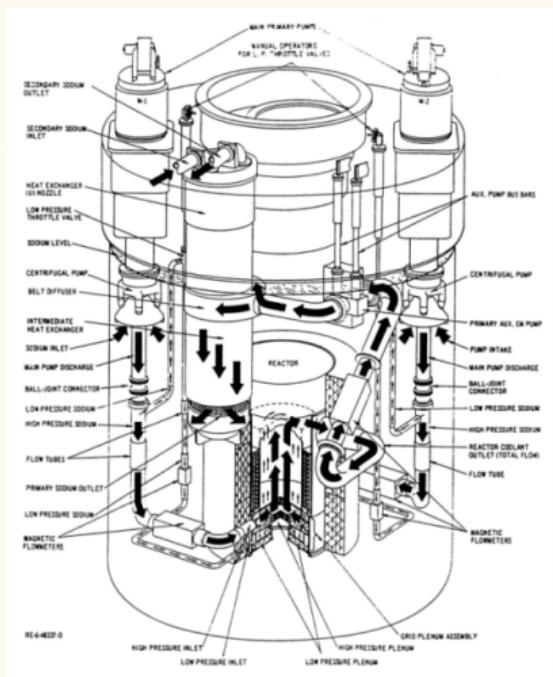
EBR-II is an Sodium Fast Reactor (SFR) design for 62.5 MW that operated from 1964 to 1994

19 MW electricity operated for 30 years with no accidents

Engineering scale facility

Breeder reactor with onsite reprocessing (pyroprocessing)

Famous test of **passive safety systems**



**TREAT**

TREAT is an air cooled, graphite moderated thermal reactor

Operation from 1959 to 1994

Transient reactor tests to simulate all sorts of reactor accidents

George Imel

Restarted and working on experiments!

Because of Fukushima, TREAT accident tolerant fuels

Everyone is excited

100 kW; transients up to 19 GW



# **Military use**

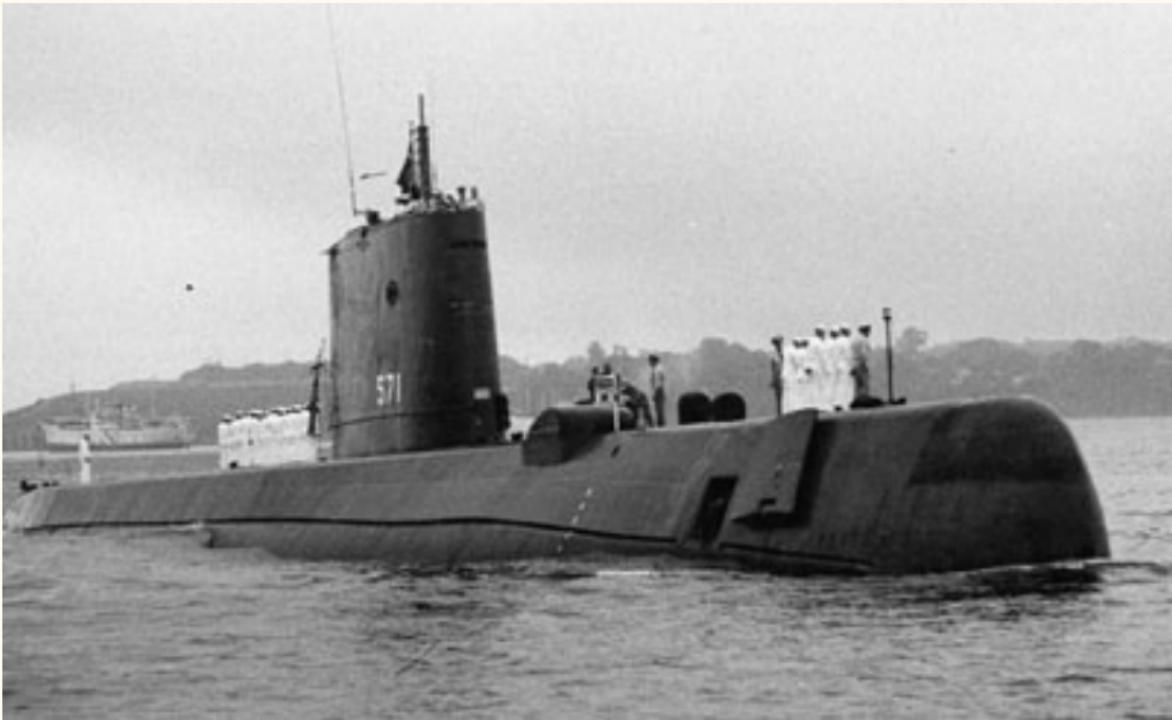
# Nuclear reactors are used on submarines and aircraft carriers

Nautilus launched in 1954

25 year life span

Nimitz-class aircraft carriers have 2 reactors, about 100 MW, 23 year life span

How about now?



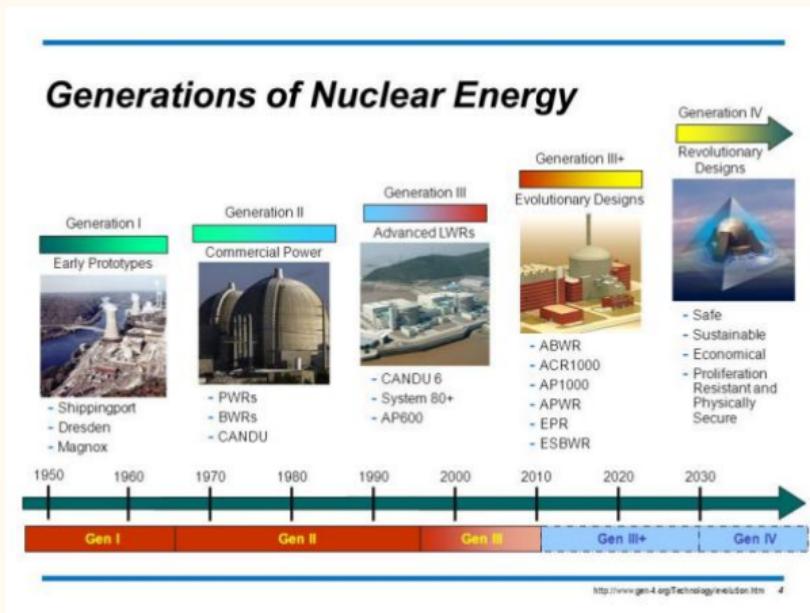


Watch out for the **danger zone**

# **Reactor concepts**

# **Generations**

# Reactors were first built in the 1950s



Gen IV is essentially based on Gen I

Different material for fuels and coolant

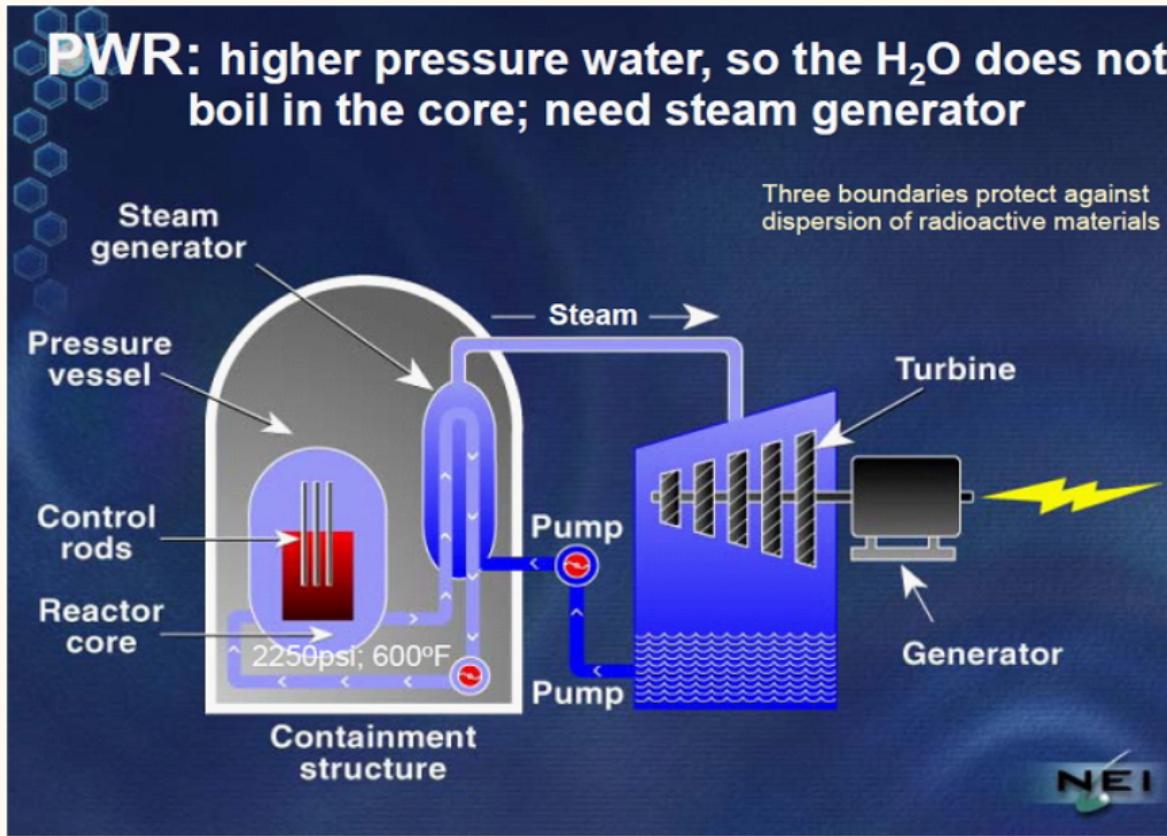
Moderators not needed for some

Passive safety systems

Proliferation issues – so they say

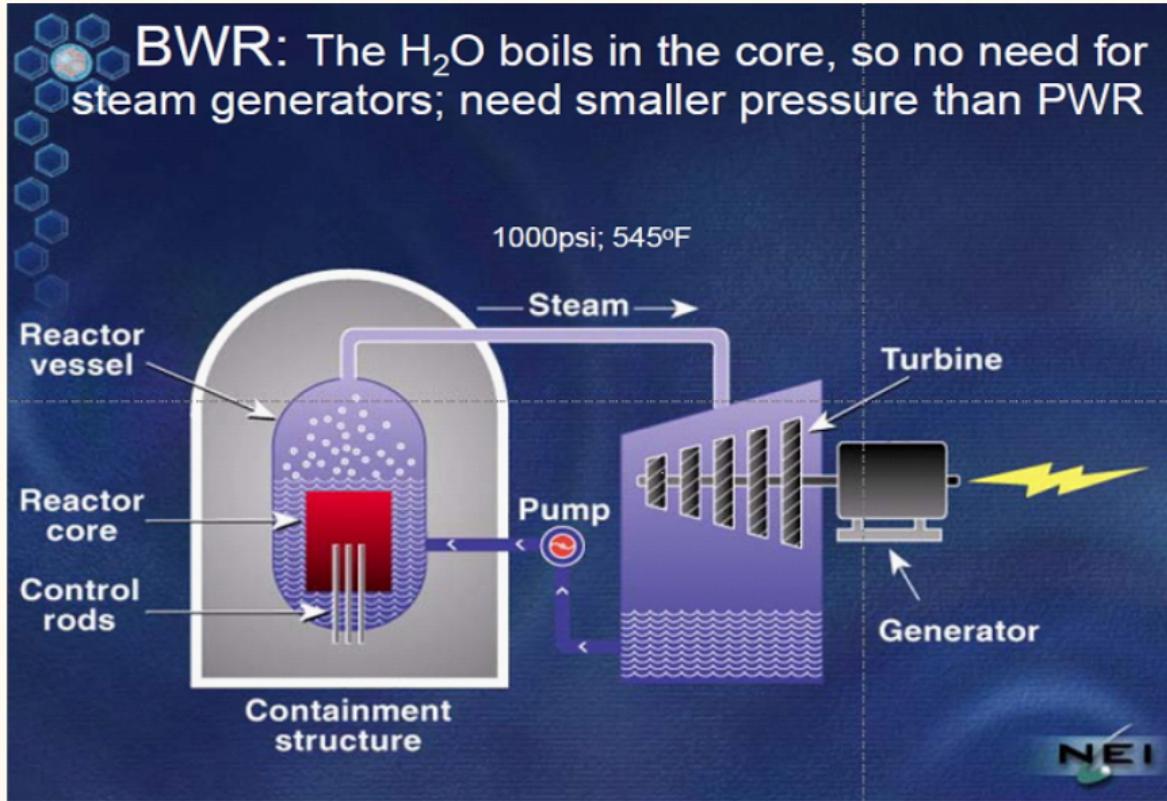
**PWR**

The PWR heats water but does not boil



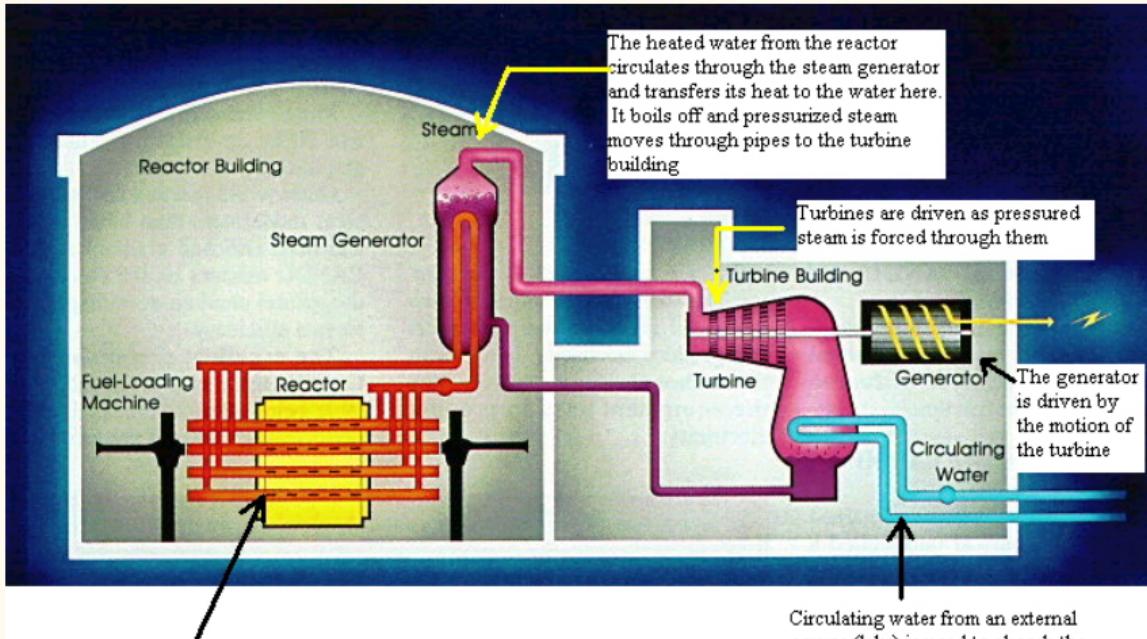
**BWR**

# The BWR does boil water in the reactor vessel



**CANDU**

The CANDU design uses heavy water (moderator) and natural uranium (also thermal)



Reactor contains U-235 with heavy water moderator.  
Heat energy from nuclear reactions is carried away by  
water which cools the reactor. The water is found in the  
pipes and is isolated from the nuclear material

Circulating water from an external source (lake) is used to absorb the heat from the steam. This cools it and condenses it to be pumped back into the steam generator. An undesired side effect is thermal pollution of the lake as the now warm circulating water is pumped back.

## More on CANDU

Used in Canada and marketed to other nations

South Korea, China, India have some

PWR design (two loops)

The heavy water is less absorbing so natural U can be used

But also more collisions would be needed than in LWRs

The core would be bigger

But can use used fuel from LWRs and a Th cycle

So is there an advantage? Technical? Institutional?

The CANDU design uses heavy water (moderator) and natural uranium (also thermal)



# **Aqueous reprocessing**

# Aqueous recycling is the commercially available process for LWRs

Terry Todd leading expert

Major nations are France, Japan, Russia, India

'Recycle' is better for the brand

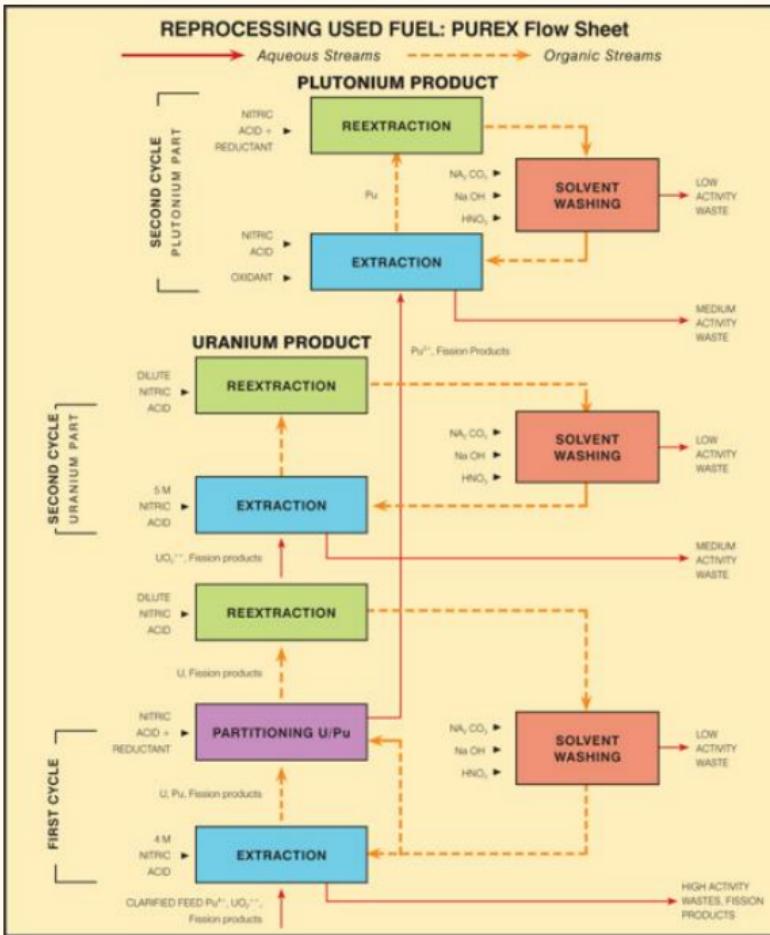
About 1% 235U and 1% Pu in used fuel

The most common is PUREX

This uses an organic phosphate and nitric acid

Solvent extraction process where U and Pu are separated

Then created into MOX fuel



# U and Pu are chemically separated through organic solvent equilibrium extraction

U and Pu exist in a number of valence states

Because of different redox potentials, reduction or oxidation can be done to one without disturbing the other

Each exhibits different solubilities in organic solvent TBP

- (1) Chop up everything, remove FP gases, dissolve in aqueous solution
- (2) Separate U/Pu from fission products by dissolving in solvent
- (3) Reduce Pu to 3+ because it is highly insoluble in solvent (U 6+)
- (4) Back extract Pu into aqueous solution
- (5) Strip U from solvent into aqueous solution

U and Pu are chemically separated through organic solvent equilibrium extraction

Aqueous solution is nitric acid

Does generate a lot of liquid waste

Mass transfer to solvent phase – extraction

Mass transfer to aqueous phase –“ stripping

# Mass transfer operates in a continuous, multistage, countercurrent mode

High separation factor

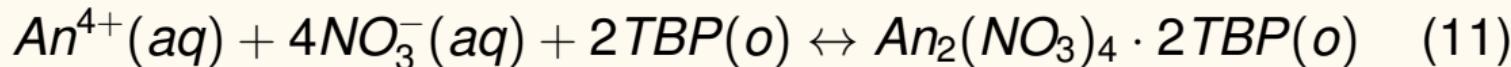
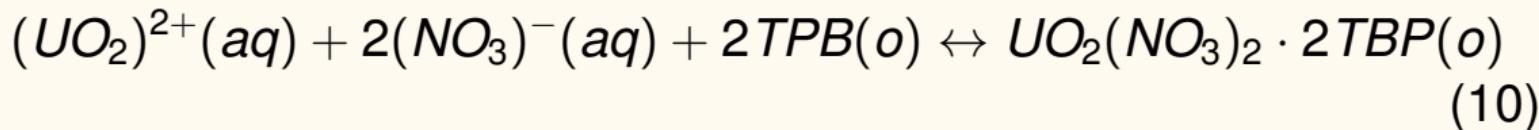
High processing rates

Streams flow countercurrently, so concentration is relatively constant

Solvent must be recycled because it's not cheap

First applied to extract Pu for weapons production in 1952 at Hanford site

Metals in 4+ and 6+ are extracted



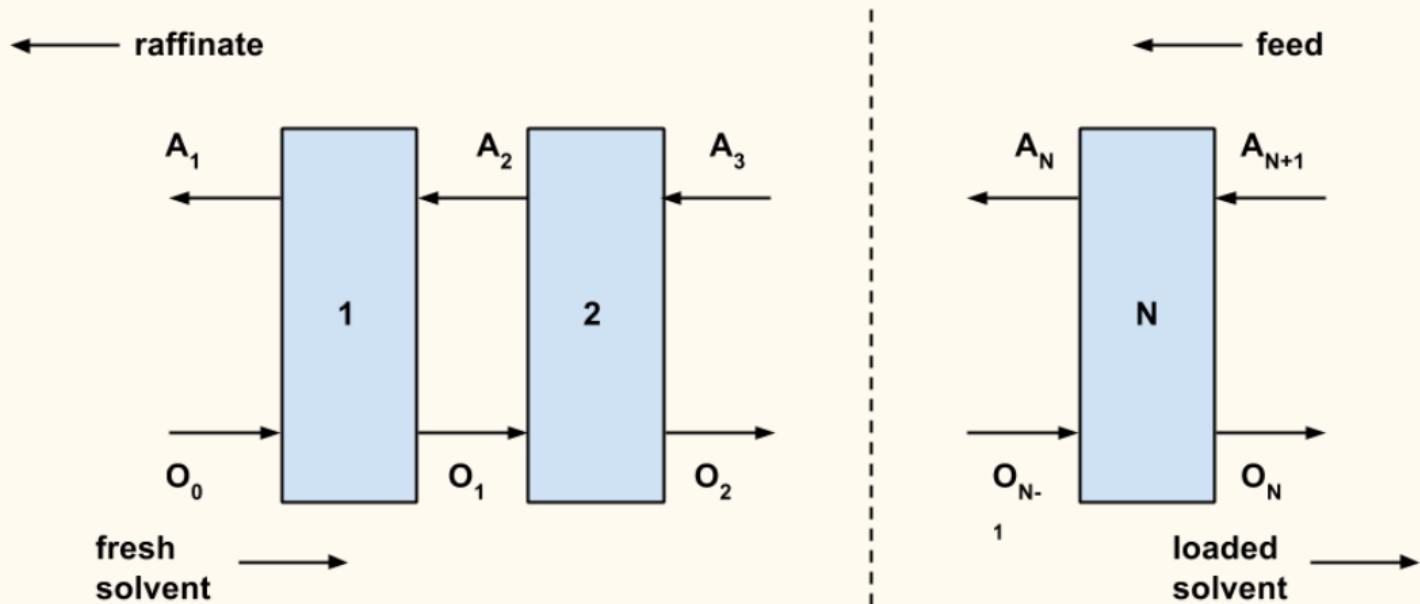
Pu (as 4+) co-extracted with U

Anything 3+ or lower is not

Waste is vitrified into a borosilicate glass waste form for disposal

Well characterized material with 50+ years of scientific study

Very stable



## Typical mass conservation is used to model solvent extraction

This is from Benedict

Distribution coefficient = organic/aqueous phase concentration at equilibrium

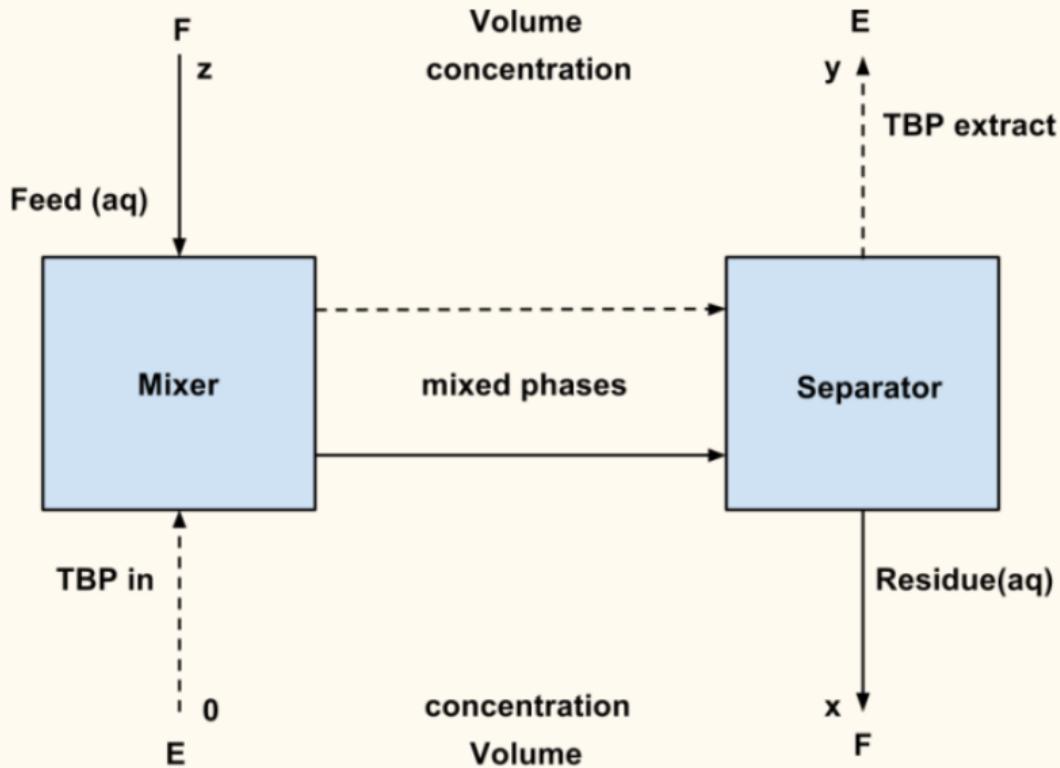
$$D \equiv \frac{y}{x} \quad (12)$$

When an aqueous solution of an extractable component is brought into equilibrium with an immiscible solvent for the component and the two phases are then separated, the component will be found distributed between the two phases

We then derive the material balance on the extractable component

$$Fz = Fx + Ey \quad (13)$$

With  $D$  for the system defined before



Derive the concentration that is extracted

$$D \equiv \frac{y}{x} \quad (14)$$

$$Fz = Fx + Ey \quad (15)$$

$$\therefore y = \frac{Dz}{1 + \frac{ED}{F}} \quad (16)$$

And the fraction extracted is –

$$\rho = \frac{Ey}{Fz} = \frac{1}{1 + \frac{F}{ED}} \quad (17)$$

For design then, you only need 3 parameters

## Derive the solvent feed needed for a given extraction fraction

$$\frac{E}{F} = \frac{\rho}{D(1 - \rho)} \quad (18)$$

What is the functional dependence of  $E(\rho)$ ?

Amount of used fuel isn't actually a variable

# Reduce the amount of solvent by using multiple contact stages

With many stages, high extraction fraction can be obtained

Solvent is expensive, so recycling stages are also added to strip out extract

Multiple components can be extracted from organic phase if  $D$  is different enough

So this would be needed to completely separate U, Pu

Physical conditions affecting  $D$  –

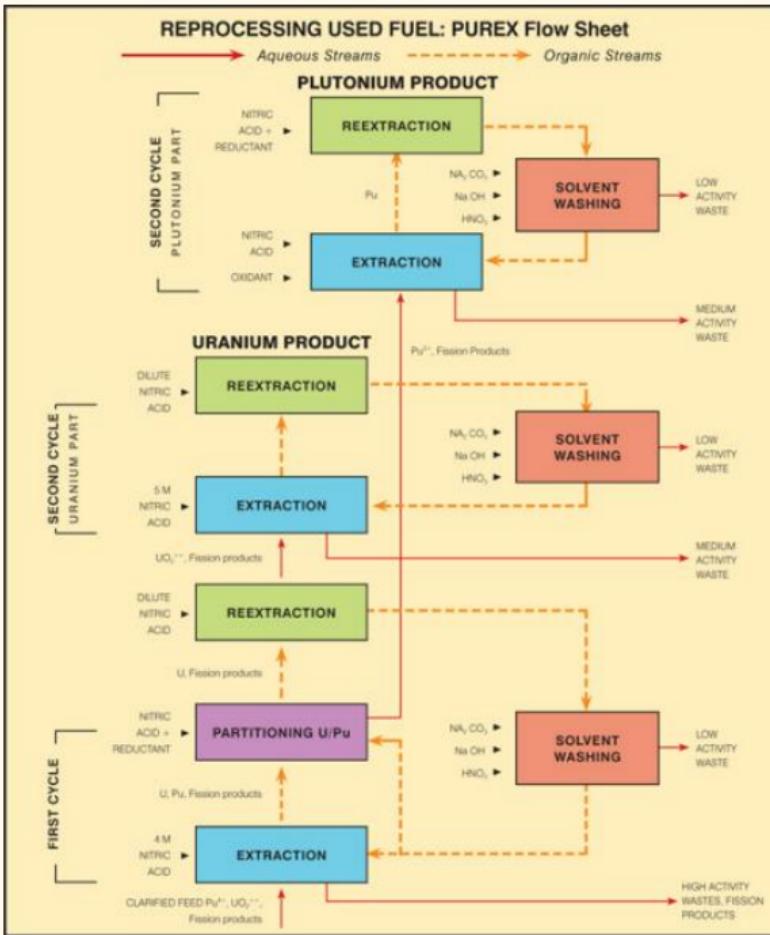
Element extracted

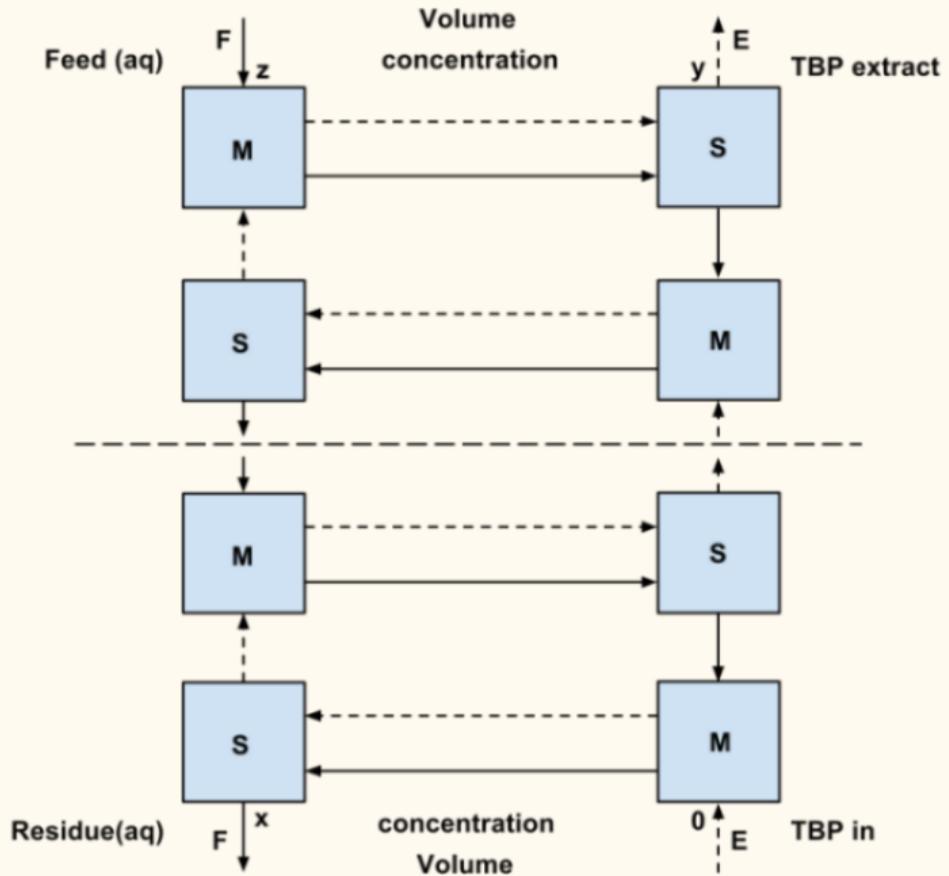
Redox potential of aqueous phase

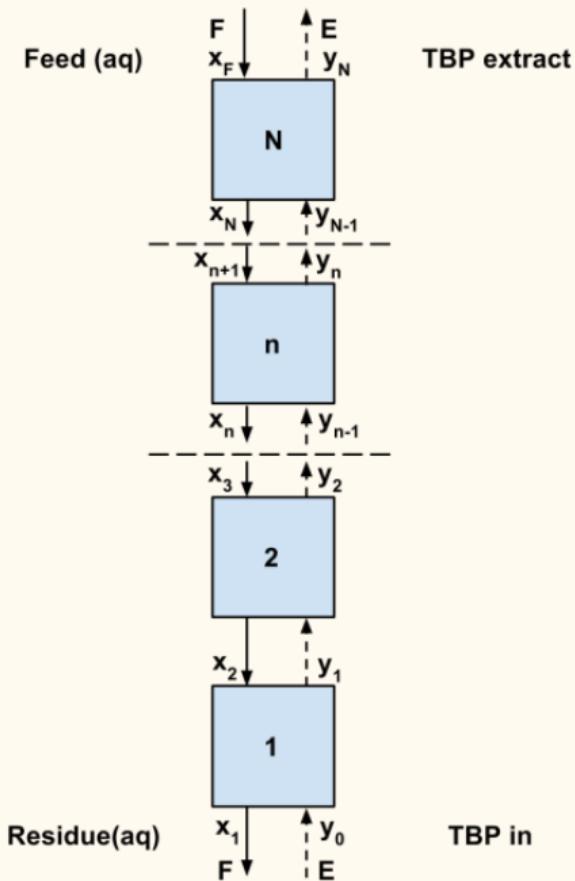
Solvent

Concentrations

$[H^+]_{aq}$







Now apply same mass conservation to multistage extraction

Assume equilibrium between phases

Material balance on extractable component below stage  $n$  –

$$Ey_0 + Fx_n = Ey_{n-1} + Fx_1 \quad (19)$$

$$y_{n-1} - y_0 = \frac{F}{E}(x_n - x_1) \quad (20)$$

∴ for any stage –

$$y_n \equiv D_n x_n \quad (21)$$

McCabe-Thiele diagram can be used for constructing graphical solution for stage concentrations

Basically gives the number of stages for an extraction concentration  $x_F$

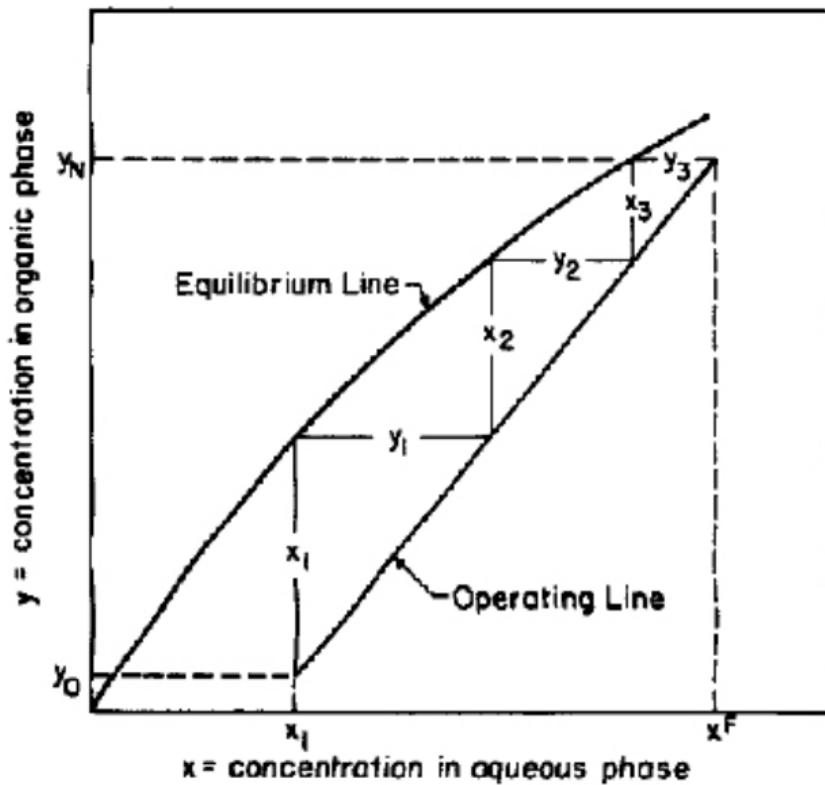
By graphing  $y_{n-1} - y_0 = \frac{F}{E}(x_n - x_1)$  on  $y$  versus  $x$

Construct operating line to satisfy the above and pass through  $x_1, y_0$  with slope  $\frac{F}{E}$  relative to equilibrium line  $y_n = D_n x_n$

Cannot really change equilibrium line because it is based on  $D$

Reduce the concentration of the extractable component from  $x_F$  to  $x_1$  with  $\frac{F}{E}$

Start at  $x_1, y_0$  and move up



## Derive the extraction factor for multiple stages

$$\rho \equiv \frac{Ey_N}{Fx_F} \quad (22)$$

Or –

$$1 - \rho = \frac{x_1}{x_F} \quad (23)$$

What does this tell us?

And feed ratio can be defined in terms of  $f(\rho)$  as –

$$\frac{E}{F} = \frac{\rho x_F}{y_N - y_0} \quad (24)$$

**How many stages for complete extraction?  
What does that look like on McCabe-Thiele?**

Apply these concepts to model multistage extraction based on Kremser equation

$$y_{n-1} - y_0 = \frac{F}{E}(x_n - x_1) \quad (25)$$

$$y_n \equiv D_n x_n \quad (26)$$

$$\beta \equiv \frac{DE}{F} \quad (27)$$

Then –

$$y_n = \beta(y_{n-1} - y_0) + Dx_1 \quad (28)$$

$$y_N = \frac{\beta^N - 1}{\beta - 1}(Dx_1 - y_0) + y_0 \quad (29)$$

This can also be applied if there are two extractable components in the feed

$$D_A \ D_B \ \beta_A \ \beta_B \quad (30)$$

Define decontamination factor. What does this mean?

$$f_{AB} \equiv \frac{\rho_A}{\rho_B} \quad (31)$$

$$f_{AB} = \frac{\beta_A}{\beta_B} \left( \frac{\beta_A^N - 1}{\beta_B^N - 1} \right) \left( \frac{\beta_B^{N+1} - 1}{\beta_A^{N+1} - 1} \right), \quad y_0 = 0 \quad (32)$$

# **Conversion & Enrichment**

# Uranium enrichment derived from World War II

Needed to make bombs

Then used the uranium for submarines

When moving to commercial power, infrastructure already in place

Gaseous diffusion first invented at Oak Ridge

Uranium hexafluoride used for enrichment

## Yellowcake needs to be purified first

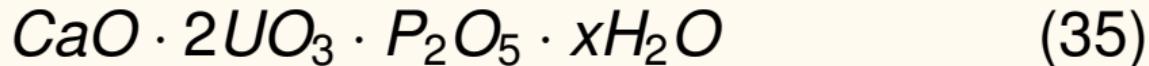
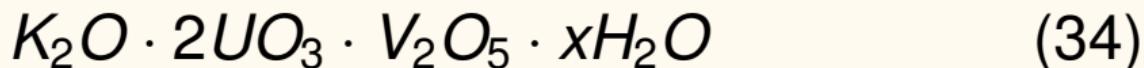
Impurities are rare earths, chlorine cadmium

Uranium readily forms chemical compounds (lots of oxidation states)

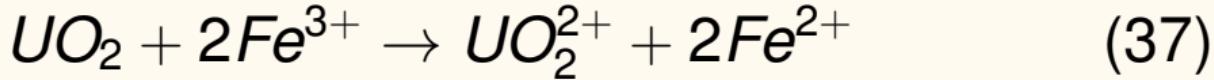
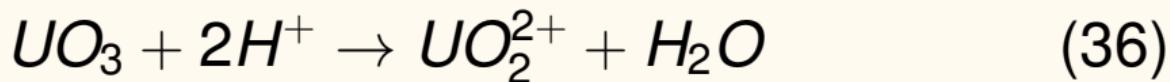
Can be extracted by organic solvents

Uranium forms complexes that can be precipitated out

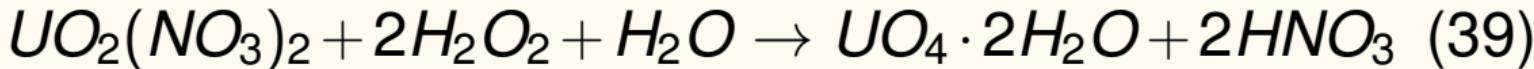
There are different forms that are mined



Goal is to get it as  $UO_3^{2+}$  and then acid or alkaline leaching



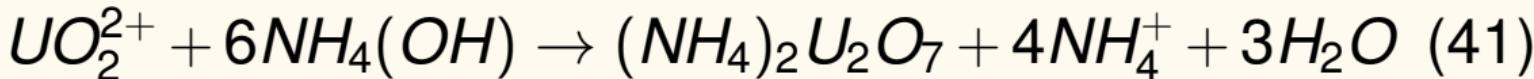
Acid leaching is like PUREX using organic solvent



Precipitates uranium peroxide



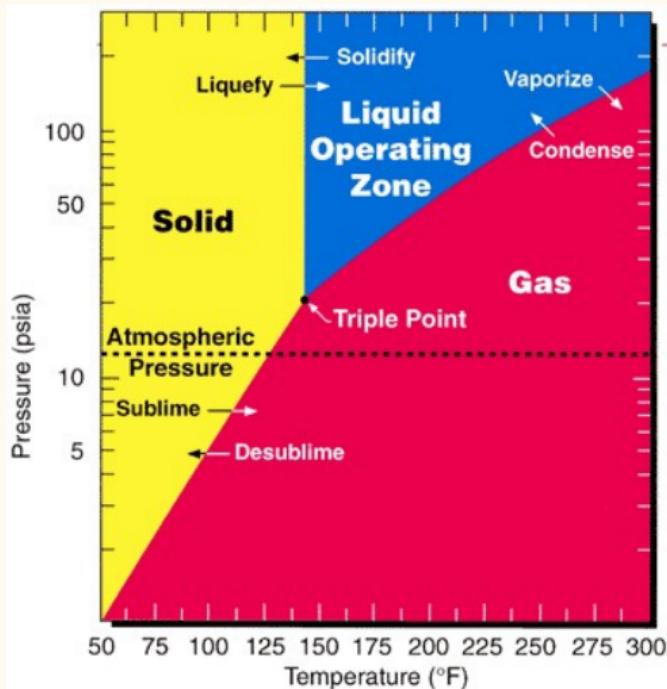
Or use ammonium hydroxide



Then dry and calcine to get  $UO_3$

If alkaline leaching is used, recover  $U_3O_8$

# Uranium hexafluoride has favorable properties



Solid at room temperature

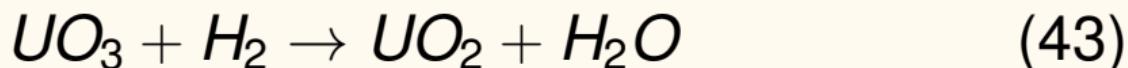
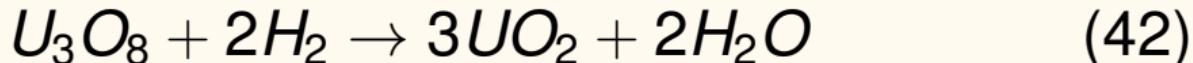
Easy to handle

Relatively low pressure

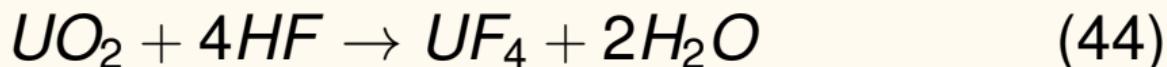
Not too high temperature to sublime

## Conversion applies hydrofluor process

Crushed  $U_3O_8$  and  $UO_3$  is reduced by hydrogen to get 'crude'  $UO_2$

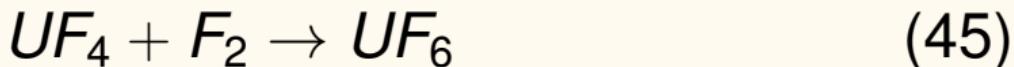


Then –



$UF_4$  is a solid green salt with a high melting point ( $1700^{\circ}F$ )

Treated with fluorine gas and distilled –



# Enrichment based on different diffusion rates

Separation factor –

$$\alpha \equiv \frac{v_5}{v_8} = \sqrt{\frac{m_8}{m_5}} \quad (46)$$

Based on kinetic energy of the molecule  $kT = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$

This just says lighter molecules move faster

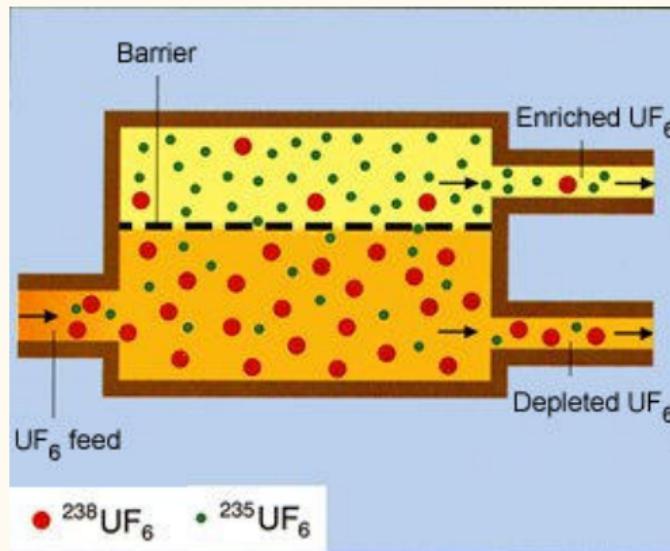
$\alpha = 1.004289$  for uranium enrichment

Higher value, easier enrichment

This isn't that high

Low enrichment takes a lot of energy

# Cascades are designed to enrich



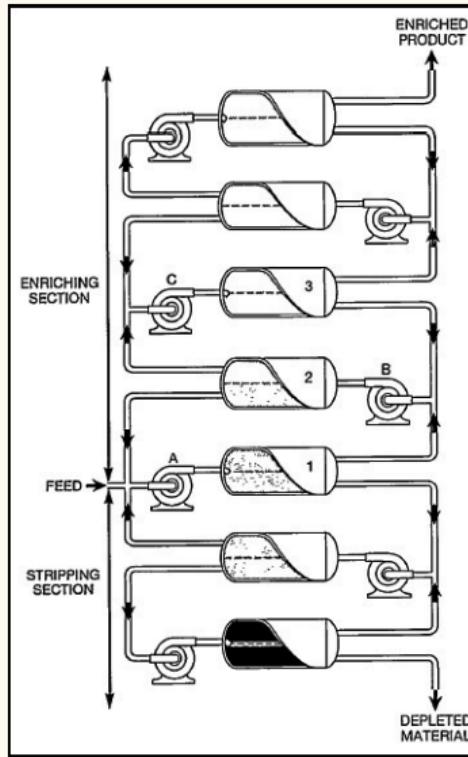
Basic operation is the stage

Join stages to form cells

Cells form unit

Together all that is a cascade

# Enriching and stripping stages added for efficiency



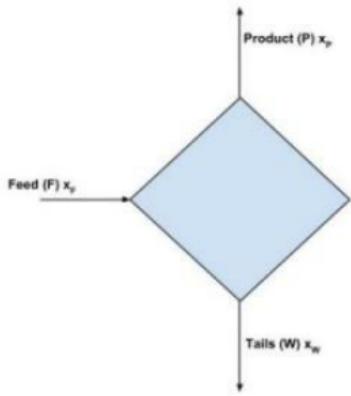
Feed enters to A-1

Enriched feed goes through B-2

Depleted through the bottom stage

Moving up is higher enrichment

# Enrichment based on mass conservation



$$F = P + W \quad (47)$$

$$x_F F = x_P P + x_W W \quad (48)$$

Separation factor ratio between product and tails –

$$\alpha \equiv \frac{x_P(1 - x_P)^{-1}}{x_W(1 - x_W)^{-1}} \quad (49)$$

## And mass flow

$x_F$  = weight fraction  $^{235}U$  feed into system

$x_P$  = weight fraction  $^{235}U$  product (enrichment target)

$x_W$  = weight fraction  $^{235}U$  waste stream (depleted U)

$F$  = mass flow rate feed

$P$  = mass flow rate product

$W$  = mass flow rate waste stream

## Derive feed factor

$x_F$  fixed at 0.00711

$x_P$  enrichment target

$x_w$  0.002 - 0.003 depends on company

Feed factor gives mass of U needed to feed into system for target enrichment –

$$\frac{F}{P} = \frac{x_P - x_W}{x_F - x_w} \quad (50)$$

Similarly waste factor –

$$\frac{W}{P} = \frac{x_P - x_F}{x_F - x_w} = \frac{F}{P} - 1 \quad (51)$$

**How are tails managed?**

# Only one company enriches by gaseous diffusion

1992 – United States Enrichment Corporation established under Energy Policy Act

1998 – privatized with so you can buy stock

Operates plant in Paducah up to 5%

## Enrichment also done by centrifuge

1970 – established with United Kingdom, Dutch, Germany

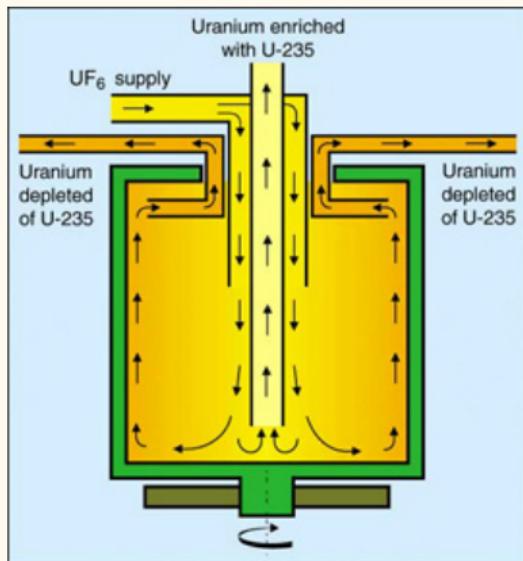
1977 – Construction of US plant in Ohio, but Reagan scrapped it in favor of laser

Rotating drum causes centrifugal force to compress gas molecules to the outer wall

Velocity of molecules separates differing those of differing weights

Light molecules collect near center of drum

## Still based on conservation of mass



Lighter  $U^{235}$  molecules collect toward center

Rotational motion of the centrifuge accelerates gas molecules toward wall

Counteracting diffusive force thermal motion of molecules seeks to distribute the gas evenly

Two forces balance to create a dynamic equilibrium

Pressure distribution in the rotor that is function of the molecular mass

$$\alpha = \exp \frac{(m_8 - m_5)\omega^2 a^2}{2RT} \approx 1 + \frac{(m_8 - m_5)\omega^2 a^2}{2RT} \quad (52)$$

$$p(r) = p_0 \exp \frac{m\omega^2 r^2}{2RT} \quad (53)$$

## Design based on separative power

$$SWU = \frac{\pi \rho D L}{2} \left( \frac{\Delta m \omega^2}{2 R T} \right)^2 \quad (54)$$

density of uranium hexafluoride; isotope self-diffusion; mass difference; length of rotor

Proportional to length and 4th power of speed

Inverse to temperature squared

What does this say about how to design the centrifuge?

It's actually small SWU per centrifuge, so up to 100,000 needed for 9 million SWU/y

That would be needed for industrial scale

# There are only 3 companies in the USA interested in centrifuges

USEC Inc. (USEC)

Louisiana Energy Services (LES)

AREVA Enrichment Services (AES)

USEC submitted application to operate a commercial facility

American Centrifuge Plant (ACP) August 2004

NRC issued a license April 2007

Construction of the facility is currently on hold (did not get DOE grant)

Chapter 11 in 2014 – now called [Centrus Energy Corp](#)

# Louisiana Energy Services activity

LES submitted license application NRC December 2003 for a 3 million SWU/year facility

One-third of the United States demand

Lea County, New Mexico

June 2006 – NRC issued LES a license to construct and operate

Began operations in June 2010 while continuing construction

Part of [URENCO](#)

July 2014 – All cascades operational

# AREVA Enrichment Services (AES) activity

December 2008 – AES submitted a license application for Eagle Rock Enrichment Facility to NRC

18 miles west of Idaho Falls!

September 2010 – NRC issued the Safety Evaluation Report ([NUREG-1951](#))

February 2011 – Final Environmental Impact Statement ([NUREG-1945](#))

October 2011 – NRC issued AES license to construct and operate the [Eagle Rock Enrichment Facility](#)

[Construction currently inactive](#)

Lasers can be used for enrichment



**SHARKS WITH  
LASER FRICKN'  
BEAMS**

# Is laser enrichment any good?

Started in 1985

Absorption spectrum of uranium metal vapor

More than 300,000 lines at visible wavelengths

Sufficient displacement between lines

Selective excitation of  $^{235}U$  based on laser wavelength

Requires liquid uranium at  $2300^{\circ}C$

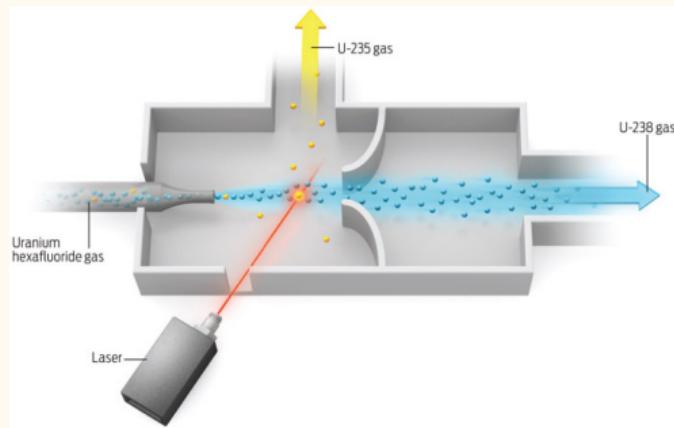
Laser at 5915 angstroms to excite  $^{235}U$

Ultraviolet light at 3100 angstroms ionizes  $^{235}U$

Then it is collected in a Faraday cup

Low throughput, high temperature, high energy

# Current developments



GE got an **operating license**

Doesn't seem like much progress, limited testing with DU in Paducah

Different process than what we were just talking about though

Looking to construct in Wilmington



# Molecular separation uses uranium hexafluoride

Uses different vibrational and rotational states between isotopes

Almost the same procedure

$^{235}U$  molecule is dissociated and precipitates to a  $^{235}UF_5$  powder

Need to reduce the vapor pressure to 77K



# SILEX seems to be state of the art

Uses carbon dioxide laser at 10.8 um and amplified to 16 um

Infrared spectrum

Preferentially excites  $^{235}UF_5$

Again trapped electromagnetically

Still inefficient due to laser frequency

# Price used to be set by government



From Atomic Energy Act 1954

Prices then set by USEC based on market conditions

Prices have been low

Used to be high because of high energy requirements of gaseous diffusion plants

What now?

# World capacity is estimated at 60 million SWU

## World enrichment capacity

US demand at 15 million SWU per year

Import a lot from Europe, Russia, China

What's the problem here?

