



Savannah River Site Watch

December 30, 2024

Thank you, Jimmy Carter, for your monumental environmental and non-proliferation decision in 1977! South Carolina and the nation owe you a debt of gratitude.

If not for President Carter's declaration against the Barnwell spent fuel reprocessing plant (Allied General Nuclear Services), South Carolina and the nation might now be awash in a vast amount of commercial high-level nuclear waste and stored commercial plutonium. That could rival what has been created from reprocessing related to nuclear weapons at the DOE's Savannah River Site, adjacent to the Barnwell site.

Below is the text from Carter's nuclear power review from 1977, in which commercial reprocessing and plutonium breeder reactors were indefinitely deferred. Though President Reagan reversed the reprocessing policy in 1981, a US prohibition against reprocessing has held. President Biden's Department of Energy has been busy giving money to reprocessing R&D but the financial and technical obstacles to the separation and use of weapon-usable plutonium in commercial nuclear reactors remain insurmountable.

Tom Clements, grandson of a Georgia peanut farmer & director, SRS Watch; [photo of Barnwell reprocessing plant, 2019](#), by SRS Watch, Columbia, SC; www.srswatch.org

Presidential Documents: Jimmy Carter, 1977

<https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ml1209/ML120960615.pdf>

Nuclear Power Policy

Statement by the President on His Decisions Following a Review of U.S. Policy.

April 7, 1977

excerpts:

We took an important step in reducing the risk of expanding possession of atomic weapons through the Non-Proliferation Treaty, whereby more than 100 nations have agreed not to develop such explosives. But we must go

further. The U.S. is deeply concerned about the consequences for all nations of a further spread of nuclear weapons or explosive capabilities. We believe that these risks would be vastly increased by the further spread of sensitive technologies which entail direct access to plutonium, highly enriched uranium, or other weapons usable material. The question I have had under review from my first day in office is how can that be accomplished without forgoing the tangible benefits of nuclear power.

We are now completing an extremely thorough review of all the issues that bear on the use of nuclear power. We have concluded that the serious consequences of proliferation and direct implications for peace and security-as well as strong scientific and economic evidence-require -a major change in U.S. domestic nuclear energy policies and programs; and -a concerted effort among all nations to find better answers to the problems and risks accompanying the increased use of nuclear power.

I am announcing today some of my decisions resulting from that review.

First, we will defer indefinitely the commercial reprocessing and recycling of the plutonium produced in the U.S. nuclear power programs. From our own experience, we have concluded that a viable and economic nuclear power program can be sustained without such reprocessing and recycling. The plant at Barnwell, South Carolina, will receive neither Federal encouragement nor funding for its completion as a reprocessing facility.

Second, we will restructure the U.S. breeder reactor program to give greater priority to alternative designs of the breeder and to defer the date when breeder reactors would be put into commercial use.

Third, we will redirect funding of U.S. nuclear research and development programs to accelerate our research into alternative nuclear fuel cycles which do not involve direct access to materials usable in nuclear weapons.

SRS Watch photo of the Barnwell reprocessing plant as it appears today & in 2019:

Old Barnwell Reprocessing Plant Stands as Tribute to Failed Idea

[Old Barnwell Reprocessing Plant Stands as Tribute to Failed Idea](#)

To underscore that President Biden is until the end of his term throwing money at a bad idea (reprocessing) with no customers, see DOE's Office of Nuclear Energy news release of Dec. 20, 2024: <https://www.energy.gov/ne/articles/us-department-energy-releases-10-million-support-research-used-nuclear-fuel-recycling>

U.S. Department of Energy Releases \$10 Million to Support Research on Used Nuclear Fuel Recycling Technologies

Funding will support U.S. industry efforts to address economic and technical challenges associated with used nuclear fuel recycling.