

Washington proposes nuclear reprocessing

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Radioactive waste reprocessing from U.S. nuclear power plants, which has never worked in the United States, is being proposed in Washington.

Congress earmarked \$50 million last month for the Energy Department to explore a new kind of reprocessing, one that would reuse a much larger fraction of the waste than had been attempted in the past, The New York Times reported Tuesday.

"Reprocessing, or processing spent fuel before it's put in the repository, is a very good way to buy time," said Roger W. Gale, a former Energy Department official who is now an electricity consultant. "It's a fail-safe in case we continue to have problems with Yucca Mountain."

However, there are still questions if Yucca Mountain will be opened as a disposal site and Ernest J. Moniz, a physics professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said that if the world built enough reactors to provide energy without contributing to global warming, a new Yucca Mountain would be needed every 3.5 years.

The only U.S. nuclear reprocessing plant built in the 1960s in West Valley, N.Y., left U.S. taxpayers with a cleanup bill of more than \$2 billion.

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