

South Africa mothballs small nuclear plant scheme

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South Africa is shelving the development of a cutting-edge nuclear reactor after the programme failed to find private investors or customers abroad, the government said Friday.

About 9.2 billion rand (1.3 billion dollars, 985 million euros) has been poured into the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor project, with 80 percent of the money provided by the South African government.

US nuclear firm [Westinghouse](#) had supported the programme but the company withdrew from the project in May, according to the ministry of public enterprises.

The project could cost another 30 billion rand to make the plants a reality, while the developers had consistently missed key deadlines, the ministry added.

"As a consequence, the scale and size of the company is being drastically reduced to a handful of people, with the focus being on the retention of its intellectual property, and of certain skills, and the preservation of its assets," public enterprises minister Barbara Hogan said on the ministry's website.

Hogan informed parliament of the decision on Thursday, saying the programme was being placed into care and maintenance as most of the staff were laid off.

South Africa had already slashed the scheme's budget dramatically this year, cutting most of the 800 jobs in the programme.

The Pebble Bed Modular Reactor was developing a new type of small [nuclear power plant](#), which could be grouped together to make bigger plants, or used individually.

Excess heat generated by the plants could be diverted to industrial applications, such as extracting oil from tar sands.

[South Africa](#) was one of the few countries in the world engaged in research on the technology, touted as much safer than earlier generations of nuclear plants.

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