

Paris, 28 May 1996

OLIS : **24-May-1996**

Dist. : **28-May-1996**

NEA/COM(96)5

JUST PUBLISHED

HISTORY OF THE EUROCHEMIC COMPANY, 1956-1990
(European company for the chemical processing
of irradiated fuels)

Thirty-five years of international co-operation
in nuclear technology

This book traces the history of the first “joint undertaking” of the then European Nuclear Energy Agency, which became the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) in 1972. The account is particularly significant in that it places the creation of Eurochemic in 1957 against the background of the overall history of nuclear energy, and reveals the part played by the project in developing the technology of recycling spent reactor fuel (from Hanford to La Hague).

Eurochemic broke new ground, and its original features are highlighted. Set up by thirteen of the Agency’s Member governments as an international shareholding company - yet open to participation by industry - Eurochemic carried out a highly innovative research programme at its site at Mol in Belgium, trained large numbers of specialists, and built an industrial pilot plant, commissioned in 1966, to process a wide variety of fuel types. Eurochemic facilitated the sharing of the technology of spent fuel recycling among advanced countries in Western Europe, and reprocessed fuels from its member countries’ reactors in its own plant.

The French version was published in April 1996; the English translation will be issued in a few months time.

Press contact: Jacques de la Ferté - Tel: (33-1) 45 24 10 10

33898

However, given the small size of this plant, and the situation of the reprocessing market where Eurochemic found itself competing with national reprocessing projects, it became impossible for the joint undertaking to achieve its original objective, which had been to serve as the nucleus of a European reprocessing industry, and operations therefore came to an end in 1975.

The Eurochemic installations were progressively taken over by the host country, Belgium, but international co-operation within the Eurochemic company continued for a further ten years, in a substantial programme of managing the radioactive wastes that had been produced. This was the first time a reprocessing plant had been decommissioned and reflected the determination of the participating governments to take responsibility for keeping the site safe.

The book also gives thoughtful consideration to the role of “joint undertakings” in research and development in advanced technologies, providing many references.

Note: Irradiated fuel discharged from reactors is chemically processed - or “reprocessed” - to recover the unburned uranium, extract the plutonium formed in it, and separate these two elements from the unwanted fission products.

“HISTORY OF THE EUROCHEMIC COMPANY, 1956-1990”
(European company for the chemical processing of irradiated fuels)
Thirty-five years of international co-operation in nuclear technology
by Jean-Marc WOLFF, Docteur en Histoire. *OECD, Paris 1996*

France only: FF 690 - Elsewhere: FF 830; US\$ 170; DM 240
ISBN 92-64-24792-0

Obtainable from distributors of OECD publications - see attached list.

In any citation, please give the title and full details