

Idaho nuclear plant would help meet demand for medical isotopes

Current shortage highlights need for domestic source of nuclear medical materials

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A critical worldwide shortage of nuclear materials has forced some doctors to forgo lifesaving imaging tests for cancer – underscoring the need for more nuclear reactors, according to a company proposing to build a nuclear power plant in Idaho.

“Nuclear power is known as the safest, cleanest form of emission-free baseload energy, but nuclear plants also produce isotopes used in medical procedures,” said Don Gillispie, president and CEO of Alternate Energy Holdings Inc. “The shortage of isotopes – like the shortage of energy – shows we have taken nuclear power for granted for too long.”

According to Reuters, "The Society of Nuclear Medicine said 91 percent of 375 members including doctors and nuclear medicine technicians at hospitals across the nation reported ... they had been affected by the shortage, with 60 percent postponing procedures and 31 percent canceling some." (<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/154059.php>)

Five aging reactors in Belgium, Canada, France, the Netherlands and South Africa produce molybdenum 99, which decays to technetium 99m, which is used in about 80 percent of nuclear medical scans. A nuclear reactor in Ontario, Canada shut down in late 2007 and will remain shut down until late 2009. The reactor produces about 40 percent of the world's molybdenum 99. The one-month summer maintenance closing of the Netherlands reactor was expected to make matters worse. Molybdenum 99 has a half-life of 67 hours, so it cannot be stockpiled.

Dr. Peter Conti at the University of Southern California said “a prolonged shortage could threaten clinical trials for cancer drugs because patients may not be able to get needed scans on schedule, forcing them to drop out.” He also said doctors at USC are performing only the most urgent tests, typically for heart scans, that tests to check if cancer has spread to bones “have gone by the wayside” and that some cancer patients will be switched to more expensive positron emission tomography scans, known as PET scans, although Medicare doesn't cover PET scans.

Gillispie said his proposed reactor would install the specialized equipment needed to extract medical isotopes.

“The U.S. has 104 reactors and it is surprising we do not have our own domestic source of lifesaving nuclear isotopes,” Gillispie said. “Our proposed reactor is too far off to help the current emergency, but with only a handful of aging reactors producing these isotopes, the problem will only continue to grow.”

In other AEHI news, on June 5, the company announced it signed an agreement with Source Capital Group Inc. to raise money for the project. The funds will cover land, water rights and engineering services to obtain Nuclear Regulatory Commission approval to construct and operate an advanced nuclear plant in Elmore County, Idaho, estimated to total some \$70 million. Every company that has undertaken the NRC application process has successfully completed it and received a construction/operation license.

The Elmore County Commission in April heard more than four hours of testimony in favor of AEHI's request to rezone land for the plant, with over 500 supporters packing the hearing room.

About Alternate Energy Holdings, Inc. (www.alternateenergyholdings.com)

Alternate Energy Holdings develops and markets innovative clean energy sources. Current projects include the Idaho Energy Complex (an advanced nuclear plant and bio-fuel generation facility, energy-neutral home and business technology (www.energyneutralinc.com), Colorado Energy Park and International Reactors, Inc., which assists developing countries with nuclear reactors for power generation, production of potable water and other suitable applications.

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