

The Department's own research and analytical efforts on global warming were not inconsiderable. Carbon dioxide research within the Department operated on a \$14 million annual budget, representing 45 percent of total federal funding in the area. In fall 1988, the Lawrence Livermore and Los Alamos laboratories joined forces with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in a global study to determine how pollution changes world climate. In November, a draft departmental report analyzed the potential for long-term emissions reduction of carbon dioxide. The report indicated that to hold emissions to 1985 levels through 2050 would require rapidly replacing fossil fuels for electricity generation with nuclear and solar power. To reduce emissions by 40 percent by 2020 would require aggressive policy intervention, applying existing and undeveloped technologies along with intense conservation efforts.<sup>144</sup>

## THE WEAPONS COMPLEX UNDER SIEGE

The implications of Secretary Herrington's "sweeping" environmental and safety reforms came into sharper focus during the last half of 1988. In August, unexpected power surges occurred during attempts to restart the P production reactor at Savannah River. Departmental safety officials, who had been belatedly and inadequately briefed on the incident, recommended that the reactor be shut down. Subsequent studies showed that no significant safety risk or threat to public safety resulted from the incident, but departmental safety officials were highly critical of operational and managerial procedures at the Savannah River site. John Ahearne, chairman of the Department's newly created independent oversight panel, the Advisory Committee on Nuclear Facility Safety, indicted officials from both the Department and its Savannah River contractor, E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, for "years of ingrained complacency and self-satisfaction. . . . One conclusion is that operating practices at Savannah River have built up over so many years and the operators had believed they have done so very well, they did not keep abreast of what

was going on in the commercial world." Deputy Assistant Secretary for Safety, Health and Quality Assurance Richard Starostecki in a tough internal memo, later made public, said that some senior departmental managers have "an attitude towards production reactor safety which on the face seems to be similar to that which existed in the space program prior to the *Challenger* accident. . . . Such a mindset presumes reactors are safe unless demonstrated otherwise."<sup>145</sup>

What began as an internal debate quickly spilled over into the public arena. Congressional hearings investigated the incident and the subsequent safety debate. The media eagerly pursued the issue. In October, the shutdown of the plutonium fabrication plant at Rocky Flats, Colorado, for safety code violations and revelations of radiation leaks at the uranium processing plant at Fernald, Ohio, heightened public scrutiny and expanded it to include the entire weapons complex. Environmental groups filed a lawsuit to prevent the Department from restarting the Savannah River K reactor before completing an environmental impact statement. Articles appeared almost daily in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. The weekly news magazine *Time* did a cover story headlined, "'They Lied to Us': Unsafe, Aging U.S. Weapons Plants are Stirring Fear and Disillusion."<sup>146</sup>

An embattled Secretary Herrington handled the growing controversy with equanimity. He noted that the Department over the past three years had been its own harshest critic, and he announced a series of phased safety and management initiatives leading to the restart of the production reactors at Savannah River. "President Reagan, and myself as Secretary of Energy, will not operate unsafe reactors," Herrington declared. "We will meet the defense needs of this country in a safe and environmentally sensitive manner."<sup>147</sup>

In December the Office of Environment, Safety, and Health completed a preliminary study of 160 sites at the sixteen weapons complex facilities, ranking them according to their potential threat to the public. The rankings were intended to assist the Department in developing a long-range cleanup