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# DOE NEWS

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## **ENERGY SECRETARY UNVEILS OPENNESS INITIATIVE**

Secretary of Energy Hazel R. O'Leary today launched a comprehensive initiative to lift the veil of Cold War secrecy and move the Department of Energy (DOE) into a new era of government openness.

As a beginning to the process, O'Leary released information about the nation's nuclear weapons program that has been kept secret for 50 years.

"Secretary O'Leary's bold new initiative will allow a more informed group of stakeholders to work with the Department of Energy to solve the problems that face our Nation," said President Bill Clinton, who has directed federal agencies to dramatically increase the public's access to information about its government. "This new policy will ensure maximum disclosure of information and technologies critical to the Nation's economic and global interests."

Examples of previously classified information being disclosed for the first time include:

- o the fact that 1/5 of all U.S. nuclear tests were kept secret; some previously secret tests resulted in radiation releases into the environment.
- o the location and quantities of the large U.S. stockpile of bomb grade plutonium.
- o key information about fusion energy, a potential energy source for the 21st century.
- o the unprecedented amount of mercury used in U.S. weapons production.

Although O'Leary characterized today's release as "the biggest delivery of declassified material in the history of this department," she pointed out that it is "just a beginning to the process."

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Considering the mountains of documents and information kept secret during the Nation's 50-year history of nuclear weapons production, O'Leary said today's release should be considered only a beginning of a process to provide public access to DOE information and facilities while protecting national security.

She committed to declassify and release more information within the next six months and called on other nuclear weapons nations to do the same.

The new initiative is divided into four parts:

- o reduce the amount of information classified, especially documents relating to environmental, safety and health issues.
- o speed up the department's information declassification process. DOE will actively seek input from the public through environmentalists, historians, state officials, etc. to establish declassification priorities. Additional document declassifiers will be appointed. Automated systems will be developed to screen documents for classified information.
- o review of all existing classification policies and related technical guidance, including the Atomic Energy Act. Classification guides will be revised to reflect changes in policy that would result in more open information because of the world entering the post-Cold War era.
- o establish an interagency coordinating process to expedite declassification and release of shared information.

O'Leary also presented other examples of how the DOE is becoming increasingly open:

- o An on-going review of available historical data concerning human plutonium experiments performed by the U.S. government more than 40 years ago. The goal is to release as much information as possible consistent with privacy concerns.
- o Today's release of a report highlighting the hazards of DOE spent fuel in storage.
- o A new emphasis on encouraging whistleblowers.
- o Today's release of a report and recommendations by stakeholders to increase trust and confidence in the DOE.
- o A special team established to improve the Freedom of Information Action process and ensure more effective, open responses.