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Key Contracts Signed For Chernobyl Decommissioning

17 Sep (NucNet): International efforts to make the scene of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident environmentally safe have taken “a major step forward” with the signing today of two key contracts by Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant.

The first contract, with the Novarka consortium, is for completion of an arch-like structure known as the New Safe Confinement (NSC). The NSC will enclose unit four at the plant as well as an older shelter that was quickly assembled after the accident and is deteriorating.

The second contract, with US-based Holtec International, is for the completion of an interim storage facility for spent fuel from units 1, 2 and 3 at the plant.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) said construction work on the NSC is expected to take 48-52 months. The shelter will create the conditions for the ultimate dismantling of unit 4, which still contains 95 percent of its original nuclear inventory.

Construction of the NSC is the most visible project under the Chernobyl Shelter Implementation Plan (SIP) agreed between Ukraine and the international community in 1997. The plan contained many other elements which had to be completed over recent years in order to allow work on the confinement to begin. The total SIP cost is now estimated to be 1.39 billion US dollars (about 1 billion euro).

The contract with Holtec International is equally as important, said the EBRD. Holtec's assignment is to complete the spent nuclear fuel storage facility for more than 20,000 spent fuel assemblies generated during the operation of the units 1-3 up to December 2000. The facility is a key element of the overall Chernobyl decommissioning plan.

Various countries have made contributions to finance these projects through donations to the Chernobyl Shelter Fund and the Nuclear Safety Account, which are managed by the EBRD. As of the end of June 2007, the Chernobyl Shelter Fund has recorded total contributions of EUR 739 million. The Nuclear Safety Account has so far received contributions of EUR 285 million.

Chernobyl NPP was granted a licence to proceed with decommissioning of the closed nuclear plant in 2002.

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