

Krasnoyarsk-26 - Russia's nuclear hell

65.000 Gulag-prisoners started in 1950 on a direct order of Stalin to dig with the most primitive equipment the biggest underground nuclear complex in the world. The nuclear mega-labyrinth is located some 250-300 m deep under the surface. It consists of 3,500 rooms and halls and operates under the name „Mining and Chemical combine“. The complex has three nuclear reactors for plutonium production, one reprocessing facility for the production of plutonium-dioxide and uranium-nitrate. Two of the nuclear reactors have been decommissioned in 1992. The third reactor is still under operation to supply the 90,000 inhabitants of the near city of Krasnoyarsk-26 (or „Zheleznogorsk) with electricity and heat.

Next to the underground complex in 1985 construction work began for an additional reprocessing plant on the surface with the name „RT-2“. RT-2 should reprocess spent fuel from civil nuclear reactors of the VVER-1000 design. But the construction of RT-2 and of a repository for liquid nuclear wastes is halted due to a lack of finances. The storage facility for solid nuclear wastes which also belongs to RT-2 is already in operation. Here are some 3.000 t of nuclear waste stored already.

Krasnoyarsk-26 is an ecological catastrophe region:

- ◆ From 1959 to 1992 the cooling waters of the two older reactors have been discharged directly from the primary cooling loop into the river Yenisey. As a consequence of this practice, large parts of the Yenisey river banks have been heavily contaminated on a length of not less than 500 km.
- ◆ Since 1963 liquid radioactive waste has been „injected“ 190-475 m down into the rock ground. The consequences of this technique are not analyzed yet, but it is specialists claim that liquid waste can spread out of the repository towards the river system of the river Yenisey.
- ◆ Those liquid nuclear wastes are pumped from the reprocessing facility to the repository site through a 20 km long pipeline. Due to a high amount of pipeline leaks, the surrounding of the pipeline is highly contaminated.

Since general Lebed has become governor of the Krasnoyarsk region (September 1998), there is a growing pressure to establish Krasnoyarsk-26 internationally as a center which is offering its services of nuclear waste management all over the world: Interim storage and reprocessing or final storage of nuclear waste. Only the Russian nuclear industry is facing the problem, that are no financial resources to complete the only up to 30% completed RT-2 and that storage of nuclear waste from other countries is forbidden under current Russian law. That's why the Russian Ministry of nuclear energy is trying to push the government to amend the Environmental Law to get the permission to store foreign nuclear waste in Russia. The fees for the storage of nuclear waste could then be reinvested onto the construction of RT-2.

Currently Krasnoyarsk-26 receives for every kilogram spent fuel from Ukraine 285 \$ and from Bulgaria 620 \$. General Lebed has decreed in December 1998 to stop all nuclear waste transports from Ukraine to Krasnoyarsk until Ukraine agrees to pay 500 \$ per kilogram. The main goal for Lebed as well as for the Ministry for atomic energy is to offer the services of Krasnoyarsk-26 in the west and to earn \$ 1,000 per kilogram spent fuel.

For more information:

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