



NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION  
PREVENTION PROJECT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
TUESDAY, August 22, 2017

CONTACT: Prof. Alan J. Kuperman  
[ak@NPPP.org](mailto:ak@NPPP.org) (512) 471-8245

## NRC Halves Export of Bomb-Grade Uranium for Belgian Medical Isotopes Following Protest from Nonproliferation Experts

AUSTIN – The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission is refusing to export nearly half the amount of bomb-grade highly enriched uranium (HEU) originally requested for a Belgian company to produce medical isotopes, according to a [Commission letter](#) this month responding to 30 nuclear security experts who had protested the original application.

According to the NRC letter, “Although the license application requested the export of 7.2 kg [16 pounds] of HEU, the NRC is issuing a [license](#) to export a reduced quantity of 3.7 kg [8 pounds].” The Commission, in the wake of the [experts’ letter of September 2016](#), apparently conducted further research and discovered the proposed export could be reduced due to previously exported nuclear material already in Europe.

The experts’ letter also created controversy in Europe, after which the Belgian company and another in the Netherlands seem to have expedited their phase-out of bomb-grade uranium for medical isotope production. According to U.S. government sources, the Dutch company will halt HEU use later this year and the Belgians by the end of 2018. By doing so, the two companies would belatedly fulfill a pledge made by their governments at the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit, in South Korea, to end such use of bomb-grade uranium by 2015.

NPPP Coordinator, Prof. Alan J. Kuperman, praised the NRC’s decision to sharply reduce the proposed export: “It’s a positive step for several reasons. First, it keeps the Belgians on a short leash, so they have extra incentive to end use of bomb-grade uranium if they want to ensure continued production of medical isotopes. Second, it reduces the risk of creating a dangerous surplus of bomb-grade uranium in Europe were the company to halt HEU use sooner than expected. Third, it sends a signal to other potential applicants that the NRC and the U.S. government are serious about minimizing HEU exports in accordance with U.S. law and policy. Most importantly, the progress of both European companies toward ending use of bomb-grade uranium will reduce risks of nuclear terrorism.”

-- [www.NPPP.org](http://www.NPPP.org) --