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Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation

Media statement

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Used fuel arrives in US

The used fuel will be permanently stored in the US and will not return to Australia. This was the final shipment of used fuel resulting from operations of ANSTO's two former research reactors.

The shipment was conducted under strict international and national security and safety standards in close cooperation with the National Nuclear Security Administration in the US. The successful completion of the shipment shows how nuclear material is handled and transported safely and securely around the globe.

The shipment of 159 used fuel elements represented about five years of reactor operations, during which time around 2.5 million patient nuclear medicine treatments were produced, a significant contribution to Australian healthcare. This was ANSTO's ninth overseas shipment of used fuel since 1963 and the third to the US.

Prior to the shipment leaving Australia all relevant local communities, Councils and elected representatives in the Sydney-Illawarra region were advised that a convoy of trucks carrying the securely contained fuel elements would pass through their suburbs in the first half of 2009. Community discussions were also held to ensure all were informed about details of the shipment. The route and timing of the shipment however could not be disclosed for security reasons and US contract conditions.

The solid used fuel elements travelled to the US in a dedicated cargo ship meeting international standards for carriage of radioactive material. The elements were safely and securely packed in purpose built sealed casks that had undergone rigorous testing to ensure they cannot be ruptured, even in the most severe accident. These casks were then placed in special shipping containers for transport. Once in the US they travelled by truck and rail to their final destination.

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