



NEWS FROM BEYOND NUCLEAR

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French nuclear companies Areva and EDF knew in 2005 of flaws at Creusot forge Beyond Nuclear calls for independent inspection and carbon testing of Creusot parts in 17 U.S. reactors

TAKOMA PARK, MD, March 31, 2017 —Letters sent to French nuclear corporations EDF and Areva by the French nuclear safety authority (ASN), reveal that the companies were alerted by the agency as far back as 2005 that there were major quality control problems at the Creusot Forge supplying their reactor components.

The companies contracted Creusot to manufacture safety-sensitive nuclear components for reactors in France and other countries, including customers in the United States. The letters were uncovered and published by Radio France investigative reporter, Sylvain Tronchet. [His story will air on April 1.](#)

The Creusot Forge remains under investigation for failure to control manufacturing defects introduced into large forgings for steel components and then covering up the mistakes in falsified quality control documents.

The defect, identified as “carbon macrosegregation,” and loss of control of the quality assurance process, has resulted in components with too much carbon content in the finished steel component that makes it vulnerable to cracking and tearing during reactor operations.

This comes on the heels of recent revelations by ASN about the Creusot Forge lacking “the safety culture . . . to produce nuclear components.”

The Radio France revelations stem from two previously unpublished letters from ASN to EDF, the first on December 16, 2005 and the second on May 18, 2006. The letters drew attention to numerous quality control problems at the Creusot Forge as well as inadequate supervision of subcontractors working there. The second letter pointed out that EDF had taken no action since ASN had voiced its concerns five months earlier.

Nevertheless, Areva and EDF continued to use the Creusot forge, awarding it the contract to manufacture sensitive parts for nuclear reactors including the lid and base of the reactor pressure vessel installed at the Flamanville EPR Unit 3 nuclear plant under

construction in Normandy and which is now being inspected. However, EDF and Areva did not go public about the problems at the Flamanville site until 2014.

Creusot has also manufactured important nuclear safety parts for at least 17 U.S. reactors including reactor vessel heads, pressurizers and steam generators. Yet the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) continues to insist there are no safety concerns or no reason to order enhanced inspections and material testing at U.S. reactors despite evidence to the contrary still emerging from France.

However, testing in the United States has begun at one reactor. The state of Connecticut has responded to a recent decision by Dominion to test at its Millstone nuclear plant by requesting that the NRC assure that inspection be independently verified and validated. So far, none of the other affected nuclear reactor sites have indicated they will inspect or test.

“It’s a matter of urgent public safety that every U.S. reactor with Creusot parts be immediately and independently inspected and materially tested,” said Paul Gunter, Director of the Reactor Oversight Project at Beyond Nuclear. “If Dominion is planning to inspect at Millstone Unit 2, why aren’t all U.S. reactors with these at-risk safety components following suit?” asked Gunter.

“An NRC order to conduct carbon testing on these vital parts in U.S. reactors is now a no brainer,” said Gunter. “These revelations raise concerns that the same cover-up by EDF and Areva could have made its way to U.S. reactors,” he continued. “It is not acceptable for NRC to sit on its hands any longer,” he concluded.

The evidence emerging against Creusot includes data falsification as well potentially catastrophic technical flaws in the carbon content of the steel forged at the plant. The carbon content of Creusot parts is at 0.3% according to the Radio France investigation, far above the French limit of 0.22%. This means that a sudden temperature change in the reactor could cause tearing or cracking of the steel, leading to potential meltdown risks at the reactor.

Beyond Nuclear has petitioned the NRC to require all 17 U.S. reactors with Creusot parts to shut down for thorough and independently verified material testing for carbon content and enhanced inspections of these safety-related components.

According to the exposé by Tronchet, the problems at the Creusot forge in 2005 and 2006 were so alarming that the director of ASN at the time, André-Claude Lacoste, went in person to the plant and was “blown away” by what he found there.

Tronchet interviewed Lacoste and former workers at the forge who confirmed the quality assurance problems as well as poor oversight of subcontractors.

Tronchet’s story told of profit and finance prioritized over safety, and a work culture that continued to degrade, along with the dilapidated physical conditions at the forge.

“Tronchet’s story describes the situation as ‘incredible negligence’ by Areva and EDF, where there is no margin for error when making safety-related parts for nuclear reactors,” said Gunter. “It is unconscionable that the NRC would continue to turn a blind eye to potential safety problems at U.S. reactors with Creusot components.”

The Tronchet article – in French – is available here: <https://www.franceinter.fr/sciences/cuve-de-l-epr-de-flamanville-l-incroyable-legerete-d-areva-et-edf>

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Beyond Nuclear aims to educate and activate the public about the connections between nuclear power and nuclear weapons and the need to abandon both to safeguard our future. Beyond Nuclear advocates for an energy future that is sustainable, benign and democratic. The Beyond Nuclear team works with diverse partners and allies to provide the public, government officials, and the media with the critical information necessary to move humanity toward a world beyond nuclear. Beyond Nuclear: 6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 400, Takoma Park, MD 20912. Info@beyondnuclear.org. www.beyondnuclear.org.