European Community

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PRESS RELEASE

EC TO BUILD "JET" NUCLEAR FUSION PROJECT IN UK

Seen as Vital Energy Source for Europe

The EC Council of Ministers agreed on 25 October to site the Joint European Torus (JET) - a large thermonuclear fusion project - at Culham, near Oxford, England. Originally sites in Belgium, France, Italy and Germany had been proposed, with Culham and Garching, near Munich, Germany, as the final contenders. Negotiations lasted nearly two years.

EC Energy Commissioner Guido Brunner told journalists that, although the delay in reaching a decision had set back the project, JET was still regarded as more advanced than similar projects elsewhere in the world, and was essential if the Community was to ensure reliable energy sources for Europe.

JET, the biggest experiment to date in European fusion research, is the centrepiece in EC plans to try to tap a new source of energy - fusion, the source of energy of the sun. Unlike fission - splitting the nuclei of heavy atoms like uranium - the JET process will involve the fusing of light atoms such as hydrogen. If fusion can be made to work, major benefits will follow.

In particular there will be no fear that fuel will run out (as there is with fossil fuels such as oil). The key elements needed for fusion are deuterium and lithium, found throughout the world in virtually inexhaustible quantities.

The road to fusion energy will be very long and most experts believe it will take decades to solve the problems involved. But EC countries agree that the prize is well worth pursuing. Construction of JET is expected to begin soon.

Further information about the JET project is available on request.

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