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ISSUES AND EVENTS

Agreement moves ITER forward

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The seven international partners in the multibillion dollar ITER fusion energy project initialed an agreement in late May to begin construction of the facility in Cadarache, France, early next year. After the US Congress and the governments of the other participating nations approve the preliminary agreement, a final pact is expected to be signed on 29 November, with the eight-year construction process beginning a few months later.



Raymond Orbach, the new Undersecretary for Science at the US Department of Energy, and representatives of the six other ITER partners—the European Union, Japan, China, India, South Korea, and Russia—initialed the agreement in Brussels, Belgium. Orbach, who has been a strong advocate for ITER since joining DOE as director of the Office of Science in 2002, was passionate in discussing the implications of the agreement, and the eventual importance of fusion energy.

Calling the signing "a momentous occasion in the history of science," Orbach told journalists that the project is "so important and has such consequences that not to pursue it would be an outrage." ITER, Orbach said, "has the potential to free the quickly growing global economy and population from the looming constraints of decreasing energy supplies and the unfortunate effects of environmental degradation."

Soon after the agreement was initialed, DOE officials announced that University of Wisconsin physicist Raymond Fonck will be the chief scientist for the US portion of ITER.

The US dropped out of the ITER project in the late 1990s because of the high cost. In response, the project was scaled back, and Orbach eventually convinced the Bush administration to rejoin. Orbach listed ITER as the top priority project in the Office of Science's 20-year facilities plan released in 2003 (see PHYSICS TODAY, January 2004, [page 23](#)).

Under the agreement, the US will provide \$1.1 billion for construction, with 80% of that in contributions of material. The US has also agreed to pay 13% of the operating costs, says Orbach, "a little bit more than some of the other partners, but we chose to do that because we want a say in the nature of the research and the outcome of the research."

Jim Dawson



Representatives of the seven international partners in the ITER fusion energy project gathered in Brussels, Belgium, on 24 May to initial an agreement to begin construction of the facility.

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