

Vienna Convention on Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage, including a supplementary funding convention to complement national compensation funding. Canada contributed to the successful conclusion of these negotiations and is considering its participation in one or both of these new instruments.

### **Surplus weapons-grade plutonium and MOX fuel**

G-8 experts have issued findings concerning the disposal or use of U.S. and Russian weapons-grade plutonium that is surplus to defence needs. The experts have concluded that blending the plutonium with uranium to make MOX (mixed-oxide) fuel for reactors is the most promising way of making the plutonium inaccessible for reuse in nuclear weapons. Once the blend is consumed in a nuclear reactor, the quality of the remaining plutonium is too poor for use in nuclear weapons. Another option would be to immobilize the plutonium in glass or ceramic logs mixed with high-level radioactive waste.

Canada has agreed in principle to consume MOX fuel in Canadian reactors if all safety, regulatory and environmental requirements can be assured. However, it is not yet known whether the United States or Russia will ask Canada for this support. As part of the assessment of the suitability of Canadian reactors for burning MOX fuel, small amounts will be burned at Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd.'s Chalk River facility in the fall of 1998.

### ***Millennium Computer Bug***

Canada and other G-8 countries are working to anticipate and prevent problems that may result from the "millennium bug," also known as the year 2000 problem. This bug results from the long-standing practice in computer programming of storing years as two digits to save disk space. Now, computer hardware, software and microprocessors must be reprogrammed, updated or replaced before 2000. If this is not done, many systems could crash or function incoherently. Such breakdowns could have an expensive impact on international trade, financial markets, utilities, defence and transportation systems, telecommunications and other sectors of society.

The Prime Minister has announced that the year 2000 computer challenge is a government priority and that all federal government initiatives are to consider its implications.

To assess the state of preparedness of the private sector and make recommendations, the government has established Task Force Year 2000, composed of 14 chief executive officers of large Canadian corporations in key economic sectors. A Statistics Canada survey of 2,000 businesses, conducted for the task force, showed a serious lack of readiness. Only 50 per cent of the businesses surveyed were taking any action and only 10 per cent had a formal