

PART ONE: THE SETTING

Fission is the splitting of atomic nuclei to release the immense energy binding the elementary particles of the nucleus. Atomic fission was introduced in wartime in weapons of unparalleled destructive power, and the dark clouds of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have hung over the commercial nuclear power industry since its birth in the 1950's. Although there are important differences between commercial nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons, the physical process of fission is the same in both. This dual character of nuclear power distinguishes it from other sources of energy.

As a result, a cardinal tenet of nuclear power regulation is the protection of the industry from possible threats. One of these threats is the diversion of nuclear material and the fabrication of either a crude bomb or a dispersal device. Another is the sabotage of a commercial nuclear power facility which, by jamming or destroying vital safety systems, could cause extensive contamination.

This premium on security is inherently hostile to the American tradition of civil liberties. Surveillance and infiltration are used against nuclear "terrorists", broadly defined. The shroud of secrecy precludes public debate. And in a nuclear emergency, the fifth and fourth amendments would probably evaporate.

