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Cantons could store nuclear waste

A SWISS organisation responsible for finding final storage places for radioactive waste says it hopes to begin drilling tests at sites in cantons Aargau and Zurich next year. NAGRA – the National Cooperative for the Storage of Nuclear Waste – is a private organisation made up of six electricity generating companies and the Swiss government.

At present nuclear waste produced by Swiss nuclear power plants is transported to France for reprocessing and storage. The problem will become more acute in 1990 when France says it is no longer willing to retain the processed waste which will have to return to Switzerland.

NAGRA has been given a mandate by the Swiss government to examine the feasibility of safe underground storage of nuclear waste in Switzerland itself. The idea is to carry out 12 test drillings in stable crystalline geological formations in the northern Swiss cantons of Solothurn, Aargau, Zurich and Schaffhausen.

NAGRA was told by the Swiss government to obtain drilling permission from the relevant local authorities but has run into severe opposition and delays in obtaining this permission, as most communities have strong reservations about the possibility of nuclear waste being stored in their areas.

Drilling should start on two of the 12 projected sites early next year, but NAGRA claims that because of the delays in getting drilling permission the deadline of 1985 for establishing proof of a safe method of underground storage is no longer realistic. The cooperative is asking the government to extend the deadline.

It is a long term project and a final solution will have to be produced by the year 2020. The processed radioactive waste returning from France from 1990, it is claimed, can be stored for up to 30 years in a provisional depot.

The question of storing nuclear waste not only from power stations but also from industry, hospitals and research establishments is a highly controversial one. Apart from public opposition to underground storage NAGRA has also had to face doubt expressed by some geologists who do not agree that underground storage is 100 per cent safe.

Swiss turn to freezers

THE consumption of frozen products in Switzerland showed an increase of 10.1 per cent in 1980, the biggest growth since 1971. Consumption works out at 35lb per head of the population. Fifty per cent of all Swiss families owned a freezer in 1980 (only 10 per cent in 1969), and this figure rises to 90 per cent if the deep-freeze compartments in refrigerators are also taken into consideration.

This remarkable success is due to the wide range of frozen products available on the market and the considerable saving of time and money they represent.

Sales index rises

ACCORDING to the calculations of the Swiss Society of Chemical Industries, the sales index of the Swiss chemical industry reached an average of 124.3 points for the year 1980 (base 100 = 1975), which is equivalent to an increase of 3.9 per cent compared with the previous year (119.6 points). In 1979 the corresponding increase was only 2.7 per cent.

The production index worked out at an average of 228.5 points in 1980 (base 100 = 1965), which is equivalent to an increase of only 1.7 per cent over the figure for the previous year. This rate of growth is much lower than that recorded in 1979 (+4.0 per cent.)

During the past year, the Swiss chemical industry's foreign trade showed a marked increase in imports and a moderate growth in exports. The latter increased by 7.5 per cent to Sfr 9.45 billion in 1980. The rate of growth in 1979 was 4.2 per cent.

Imports on the other hand increased by 19.1 per cent to reach Sfr 6.28 billion.

The Swiss chemical industry's traditional favourable balance of foreign trade fell by 9.9 per cent to settle at Sfr 3.17 billion. For both exports and imports, Europe remains the Swiss chemical industry's most important commercial partner.

New coffee machine

A SWISS firm has just placed on the market a new coffee-making machine which makes a whole pot of coffee in a few minutes, without paper filters.

Thanks to its electronic controls, it makes not only Expresso and Ristretto but also Cappucino. Only the quantity of fresh water actually needed is heated, which also represents a considerable saving in energy.

Auto-tickets

A SWISS firm has produced a new fully automatic ticket checking system, similar to that in use in London Underground, which has been adopted by aerial cableway and ski-lift companies in both Swiss and foreign resorts.

After buying their tickets skiers simply insert them in the machines installed at all lifts and the turnstiles automatically open.

CHOSEN FOR THE SHUTTLE

THE American astronauts taking part in the Shuttle programme wear wrist chronographs made by a well-known Swiss firm. In fact Swiss chronographs have been used by NASA for many years.

Being among the few objects of standard production forming part of the astronauts' official equipment, they were first selected in 1963, after extremely severe tests.

Since 1965 these timepieces have accompanied and assisted every astronaut with complete reliability on 30 missions, from Gemini, Apollo and Skylab to ALT/Shuttle, the atmospheric flight and space shuttle landing tests.

One of these chronographs was worn by Neil Armstrong on July 21, 1969, when he became the first man to set foot on the moon.

But their most spectacular and at the same time most dramatic role was played on April 16, 1970, at the end of the Apollo 13 mission, when the astronauts in the damaged module – on the far side of the moon — depended entirely on their precision for selecting the precise moment to switch on the ignition of the rockets which enabled them to return to earth safe and sound.

The watches for the Shuttle programme were chosen after studying all the tenders submitted to NASA and a series of trials and tests which were much more severe than those laid down for space expeditions.

The tests were carried out in specialised laboratories in both the United States and Switzerland.

Swiss Timing wins contract

THE organising committee of the 14th Winter Olympic Games, which will be held in Sarajevo in 1984, has selected Swiss Timing Ltd to handle the timekeeping at this event.

The company's long experience in this field and its considerable technological knowhow were instrumental in enabling it to win this contract.