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## Global Stocks of Nuke Bomb Material Growing-Survey

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By Louis Charbonneau

VIENNA (Reuters) - The world's stockpiles of plutonium and highly enriched uranium useable in atomic weapons are growing, despite increasing fears about the security of nuclear materials, a U.S. based think-tank says in a new report.

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The estimates of civilian and military stocks of plutonium and highly enriched uranium (HEU) -- information treated by most governments as classified -- were prepared by the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS), run by former U.N. weapons inspector David Albright.

"At the end of 2003, there were more than 3,700 metric tons of plutonium and highly enriched uranium -- uranium enriched to 20 percent or uranium-235 -- enough for hundreds of thousands of nuclear weapons, in about 60 countries," Albright and Kimberly Kramer wrote in an article to be published in the next issue of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists.

Most of the weapons-useable material is in Russia, followed by the United States.

In response to intelligence reports that terrorists are interested in acquiring nuclear weapons, the United States and Russia are working with the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to recover and secure all U.S. and Russian bomb-grade material spread across the globe.

Other states with some plutonium or HEU include the other declared nuclear powers -- Britain, France and China -- as well as Belgium, Italy, Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and former nuclear power South Africa, ISIS says.

North Korea, which withdrew from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) last year, had some 15 to 39 kg of plutonium and two to nine nuclear weapons at the end of 2003, according to a table in the article.

The article says that military plutonium stocks are also growing in Israel, Pakistan and India -- countries known to possess nuclear weapons but which have not signed the NPT and are therefore not subject to IAEA safeguards.

The fact that states outside the NPT continue to make bomb material highlights the need for "an international ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons," it says.

Albright and Kramer are not optimistic: "Civil plutonium stocks are not expected to decrease in the next 15 years."

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