

From the Atlanta Business Chronicle

:<http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/print-edition/2015/01/02/a-new-year-s-resolution-on-recycling.html>

A New Year's resolution on recycling

SUBSCRIBER CONTENT: Jan 2, 2015, 6:00am EST

Tim Echols

Most people who go to France want to see the [Eiffel Tower](#), Arc de Triomphe, or Notre Dame de Paris. I wanted to see the Areva LaHague Recycling plant near Normandy—on the north coast of France. As an energy regulator, let me tell you why this plant is significant and why the United States should build one like it.

First, even though carbon dioxide is getting all the press these days, it is nowhere near the toxicity of spent nuclear fuel from commercial reactors. This material, which Georgia has literally tons of, must remain isolated for hundreds of thousands of years. And unfortunately, that is all the United States has done with the waste — let it sit at plant sites. The French, however, have taken a different course.

Starting in 1990, the French did what the United States backed away from — they built a commercial recycling plant for spent nuclear fuel. In fact, they used our technology. They took the heavy uranium filled fuel rods, and figured out how to reuse 95 percent of the material, and how to do it safely. By separating the uranium and plutonium from the fission products, they took advantage of all the energy left in the material.

So you may be wondering why the United States would not want to do the same thing. We tried. We began projects in 1966, and again in 1970. Sadly, we were in middle of constructing recycling plants in South Carolina, Illinois and New York when then-President [Jimmy Carter](#) in 1977 abruptly terminated federal support of commercial recycling. Sound familiar? [President Obama](#) shut down Yucca Mountain construction in similar knee-jerk fashion when he took office.

President [Bush](#) rescinded the actions of [Jimmy Carter](#) regarding recycling. We have the contractual structure in place and the **Nuclear Regulatory Commission** could license a facility tomorrow.

But things aren't that simple in Washington, are they? Let's hope this new Congress will take action on this important matter before we think another second about carbon dioxide.

Tim Echols is a member of the Georgia Public Service Commission.