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Nuclear power in Germany: a chronology



Germany's first nuclear reactor: the Atomic Egg in Garching

Half a century has passed since Germany began exploring nuclear energy. DW-WORLD takes a look at the history of atomic power and protests against its use in the country.

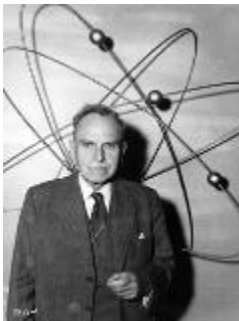
1957

The first nuclear research reactor, the so-called Atomic Egg, begins operating in the town of Garching near Munich.

1960

Germany's Atomic Energy Act takes effect. The law is meant to promote nuclear energy.

1961



Otto Hahn

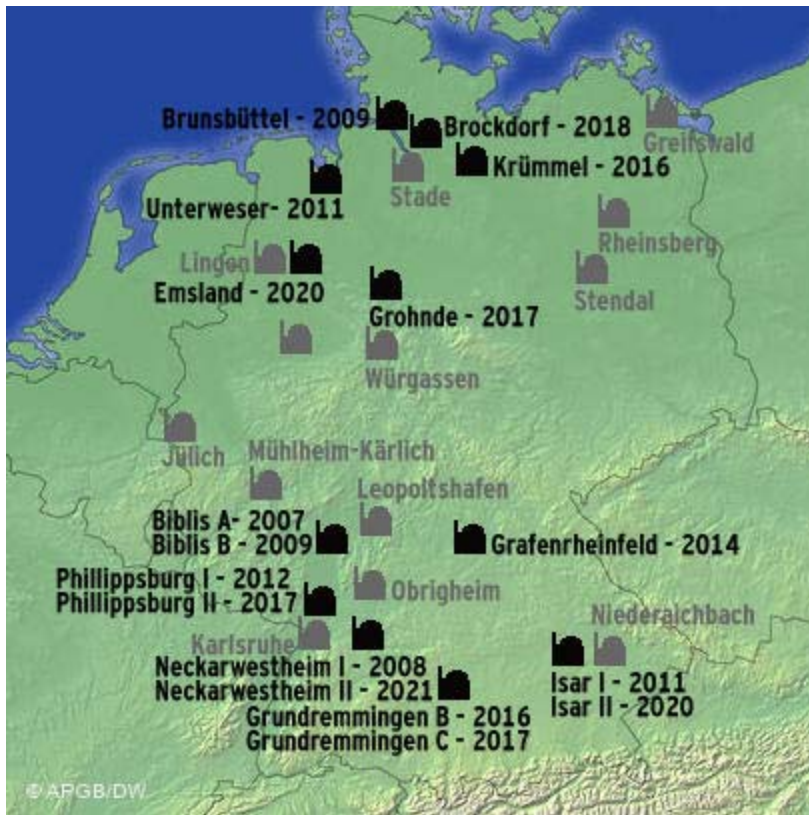
Germany's first nuclear power plant goes online in Karlstein am Main, just east of Frankfurt. The town still includes a symbol of an atom in its seal.

1968

The ore cargo ship "Otto Hahn," which uses nuclear power and is named after the German discoverer of nuclear fission, begins work as a research ship. In 1979, it is retrofitted to run on diesel.

1970s

The oil crisis becomes a major boost for nuclear power in Germany and leads to the construction of several new nuclear power plants.



German nuclear power plants and their remaining lifespans

1975

The first major anti-nuclear protests with about 30,000 demonstrators take place in Germany against construction of a new plant in Wyhl am Kaiserstuhl on the French border in southwestern Germany. The plant is never built and the land eventually becomes a nature preserve in 1995.

1979

The meltdown at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania (USA) on March 29, 1979, causes the anti-nuclear movement in Germany to grow.

Early 1980s

Plans to build a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in the Bavarian town of Wackersdorf lead to major protests. The plans are abandoned in 1988. It still isn't clear whether protests or pragmatic cost calculations by the operating company led to the decision.

1981



Thousands protest against the Brokdorf nuclear plant

On Feb. 28, Germany's largest anti-nuclear demonstration takes place against construction of the Brokdorf nuclear plant on the North Sea coast west of Hamburg. Some 100,000 people face off with 10,000 police officers. The plant begins operations in October 1986. It is scheduled to go offline in 2018.

1986

The Chernobyl nuclear power plant catastrophe on April 26 leads to a major shift in attitudes regarding nuclear power in Germany. The environment ministry is founded as a result.

2002

The "Act on the structured phase-out of the utilization of nuclear energy for the commercial generation of electricity" takes effect -- 16 years to the day after Chernobyl and following a drawn-out debate among political parties as well as lengthy negotiations with nuclear



Then Environment Minister Juergen Trittin unveils a "nuclear power: off" poster on the ministry's wall in 2005

power plant operators. It calls for the shut-down of all German nuclear plants by 2021. The Stade nuclear plant is the first one to go offline in November 2003, followed by the Obrigheim plant in 2005. The Biblis A plant is scheduled to be shut down this year.

2006



A Castor transport in November 2006

Nuclear waste transports in so-called Castor containers continue to trigger protests along the route.

2007

Amid fears that Russian energy supplies to western Europe might not be reliable, conservative politicians, including Chancellor Angela Merkel and Economics Minister Michael Glos, continue to question the

decision to phase out nuclear power in Germany.

In the summer, two nuclear power plants near Hamburg shut down: after a fire breaks out at Krümmel and a short-circuit occurs at Brunsbüttel. But operators say there is no trace of increased radioactivity. Still, the technical mishaps rekindle the debate over nuclear safety. Brunsbüttel shuts down three times in three weeks due to technical mishaps.



Krümmel is shut down after a fire in a transformer

Growing criticism of operator Vattenfall Europe's handling of the problems causes the CEO to resign and government leaders begin mulling the future of atomic energy.

2008

In June, a German nuclear power station at Philippsburg near Karlsruhe is taken offline due to an internal leak, but there is no evidence of any release of radioactivity.

In July, Chancellor Angela Merkel rejects her Social Democratic coalition partners' proposal to include a ban on the building of new plants in the constitution in return for their agreement to prolong the operation of existing ones. Merkel also says she does not believe that Germany could completely do without nuclear power and also reach its carbon dioxide emission targets.

In September, Germany's Federal Office for Radioactive Protection is slated to take over the ailing Asse nuclear storage facility in the state of Lower Saxony after strong criticism of the operator for failing to alert the government to violations at the location. Asse's operators are slammed for depositing highly radioactive waste for decades at the decrepit site.



In November, thousands of protestors hold up a truck convoy carrying 11 containers of nuclear waste from France to the Gorleben storage site in Lower Saxony; some of the protestors turn violent. Demonstrations of this sort occur frequently along routes to the Gorleben location.

2009

One of the more peaceful protests at Gorleben

In July, one of Germany's most modern nuclear power stations - the Emsland reactor in the northwest - undergoes an automatic shutdown due to a technical fault. Earlier in the month, the Krümmel reactor near Hamburg, also shuts down - shortly after reopening following two years of repairs. The Environment Ministry announces that electrical systems at nuclear power plants nationwide must be checked.



Former Chancellor Kohl's government has been accused of tampering data on nuclear storage risks

These incidents reignite the debate on nuclear power in the run-up to the national parliamentary election on Sept. 27.

In early September, evidence surfaces implying the administration of conservative Chancellor Helmut Kohl tampered with a report to play down the risks of nuclear waste storage at the Gorleben site during the 1980s.

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