Chain Reaction Encyclopedia Article

Chain Reaction

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Contents

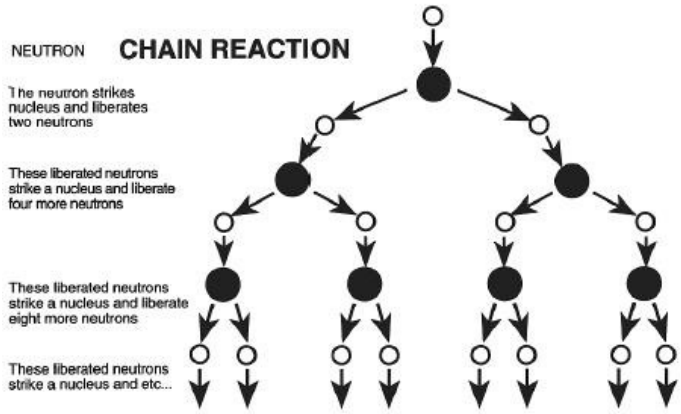
Chain Reaction Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Chain Reaction.....3

Chain Reaction

A situation in which one action causes or initiates a similar action. In a nuclear chain reaction, for example, a **neutron** strikes a uranium-235 nucleus, causing the nucleus to undergo fission, which in turn produces a variety of products. Among these products is one or more neutrons. Thus, the particle needed to initiate this reaction (the neutron) is itself produced as a result of the reaction. Once begun, the reaction continues as long as uranium-235 nuclei are available. Nuclear chain reactions are important sources of fission and fusion energy.



A chain reaction. (Illustration by Laurence Lawson. (Reproduced by permission.)