

# NUCLEAR SHORTS

## Radioactive Waste 1, Poisoned Scrap Yard 0

COLUMBUS, Ohio — A federal judge ruled against a Mansfield, Ohio junkyard owner seeking damages from the federal government for its radioactive contamination of his land.

Allen Hogan has contested U.S. District Judge James Graham's decision that the Department of Defense owes him no compensation for selling him 2,200 pounds of radioactive scrap metal from a Minuteman nuclear missile in 1994. Hogan didn't discover that the material was radioactive until years later.

Federal officials spent more than \$80,000 searching for and removing the radioactive magnesium from Hogan's 27-acre plot, but small pieces remain. Department of Justice Senior Attorney Steven Talson argued that those remaining scraps emit very low levels of radiation, representing no real health threat, and the one-time contamination has not damaged the property's value.

Hogan and his lawyers dispute the government's reassurances and argue that the contamination ruined any chance of selling the property. Hogan's suit asked for \$10 million, but under federal law the most he could collect is the land's fair market value. His attorneys estimated that at about \$750,000, including more than \$435,000 in mineral rights for sandstone deposits.

Experts for the government argued Hogan's property is worth no more than \$110,000, and because of its use as a scrap yard may be worth as little as \$26,000. Hogan intends to appeal the ruling. — *The Mansfield News Journal*, Sept. 27, 2003

## Florida Fights Radioactive Phosphate Legacy

CHARLOTTE, Florida — Over one billion gallons of acidic radioactive water stands in ponds on top of a crumbling mountain of phosphogypsum waste in Manatee County, Florida — left behind by the defunct Mulberry Phosphates chemical factory. Area residents may be getting sick from the contamination.

One estimate for cleanup of the water came in at \$160 million. Some legislators are pressing for a bill that hikes the severance tax to \$1.63 from \$1.30 per ton of mined phosphate. That would raise about \$40 million per year, a \$10 million increase.

The state has been scrambling since January to treat and dump the water into Bishop Harbor and the Gulf of Mexico.

Last spring, residents near the Coronet phosphate animal feed factory in Plant City, built on a former phosphate mine, told government officials of rampant illnesses. Similar concerns have surfaced at a former Agrico phosphate mine in Pensacola.

— *Charlotte Sunline News*, Sept. 28, 2003

## Uranium & Thorium for Sale

PRAGUE — Two men from Slovakia face up to 15 years in prison for attempting to sell what appears to have been low-grade uranium for \$700,000 to undercover Czech Republic police. Radioactive sources can be stolen from nuclear waste dumps, hospitals and factories.

This case involved the largest seizure of radioactive material anywhere in the world in the last nine months. It is not the first time smuggled uranium has been seized in the Czech Republic. In 1998 seven members of a uranium smuggling gang were arrested and sent to prison. They included a former Czechoslovak army officer and a nuclear physicist.

The first tests of the four parcels in the recent case found traces of thorium in the uranium mix.

— *Voice of America*, Vienna, *Buffalotimes.com* and AP, Nov. 16, 2003

## HHS: Shabby Investigation Finds No Danger

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) proudly announced at a public meeting in early June that it had studied uranium emissions at the Y-12 nuclear weapons facility in Oak Ridge, Tennessee and found they posed no threat to the health of those living in surrounding communities. What HHS did not share with the local community was the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) assessment of its study. In an April 24 letter evaluating the study, Lowell Ralston, a radiobiologist for the EPA's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, pointed out that HHS had "miscalculated the total radiation dose for all pathways by nearly a factor of 10," used overly conservative assumptions and values, did not sample undisturbed soil in nearby areas, and chose not to examine any areas that were actually downwind from the site. Ralston concluded his remarks by pointing out that HHS also used health evaluation criteria that "exceed the limits of national and international radiation protection advisory organizations, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the EPA."

— *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Sept./Oct. 2003

## Halifax Waters Used for DU Firing Range

HALIFAX, Nova Scotia — The Canadian Navy fired thousands of toxic, radioactive uranium-238 shells into a target range near Halifax. Fishermen in the area say they had no idea depleted uranium (DU) was scattered over the fishing grounds. The Navy says the ammunition is safe, but nuclear experts disagree. Some say it could pose a serious hazard.

Until about a year ago the shells were fired from a Phalanx gun, which used shells made of DU, a by-product of the nuclear industry. The hardened shells are used to penetrate armor plating. The guns were installed on Canadian ships just prior to the Gulf War.

Over the years the Navy fired six tons of DU shells, mostly into a fishing area near Eastern Passage, off Halifax Harbor. The Navy says the depleted uranium is safe. "From our viewpoint we have not dumped nuclear waste, that's stretching it," Lt. Cmdr.

Bill McKillip, a Navy spokesman, told CBC TV. DU was widely used in the Gulf War. It is being blamed for cancers in Iraq and even for Gulf War Syndrome. Now thousands of shell casings are lying a few kilometers offshore from Halifax. Lt. McKillip said there are no plans to either clean up the slugs or test to see if radioactive material has entered the food chain.

— *CBC News Online*, Sept. 22, 2003

## Boiling Acids May Wreck Yucca Mt. Dump Plans

LAS VEGAS — Independent scientists have identified a new problem with the proposed Yucca Mountain nuclear waste dump, stating that the government's design will cause metal containers of irradiated fuel to corrode and leak. The finding from the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board could complicate the DOE's effort to submit a license application for the dump. A letter signed by the board's 10 scientists said the DOE's design "will result in perforation of the waste packages, with possible release of radionuclides."

The DOE's current plan calls for canisters of nuclear waste to be spaced tightly within repository drift tunnels, so that the extreme heat from irradiated waste fuel rods will prevent corrosion by driving away water trickling through mountain cracks. But the new report says moisture in the drifts will interact with dust and salts to form an acidic brine on the canisters, causing pitting, crevice corrosion and stress cracks.

The review board's findings were seized-on by Nevada's elected officials as further evidence that the repository plan should be abandoned. The state of Nevada and environmental organizations have contested the license application, charging the DOE plan is flawed and will jeopardize public health.

To win a license, the DOE must demonstrate that the mountain's natural features and the waste canisters' design can keep radioactive materials from escaping into the environment for 10,000 years. However, studies emerging from the DOE and a research arm of the NRC suggest that corrosion is likely to begin within 1000 years. An expert consultant for the state of Nevada has even said mineral-rich water trickling onto the containers could cause pitting or small holes in two years' time.

— *Las Vegas Review Journal*, Oct. 22, 2003

## U.S. Nuclear Sub Hits Mediterranean Sea Floor

GAETA, Italy — Shortly after midnight October 25, the *USS Hartford*, a nuclear-powered Fast Attack submarine, ran violently aground in the Mediterranean Sea north of Sardinia, Italy. The U.S. Navy was only able to cover-up the incident until mid-November, when relatives of the Los Angeles Class submarine's crew discovered, just a month after it began, that its six-month tour of duty was being cut short.

The 7,000-ton sub hit the rocky seabed, causing extensive damage to the rudder, sonar and other electronic equipment. Temporary repairs will be made in Italy before it begins its journey across the Atlantic to its home port in Norfolk, Virginia, for full repairs. The Navy said the *Hartford's* reactor suffered no damage and there were no injuries to crew. Both the *Hartford's* captain, Christopher Van Metre, and his squadron commander, Greg Parker, were immediately fired. A spokeswoman for the Navy told the British *Independent* that U.S. Admiral Stephen Stanley "no longer had confidence in their ability to command."

The submarine is part of the Navy's Sixth Fleet, a battalion of ships based in Gaeta, Italy, near Naples. The Sixth Fleet provided extensive sea support for the recent war on Iraq.

Italian officials reacted angrily to the incident and the resulting cover-up. The *Independent* reported that Italian Green Party MP Mauro Bulgarelli said in Parliament, "Our country was denuclearized nearly 20 years ago, due to the wish of the overwhelming majority of the Italian population. It is unacceptable that, thanks to American troops based in our territory, the nuclear risk should be reintroduced. In another age, that would be called colonization." — *Bellona Foundation*, Oslo, Norway, Nov. 13, 2003

## Tooth Fairy Project Releases Grim Results

POTTSTOWN, Penn. — A study released by the Radiation and Public Health Project reports high levels of strontium-90 in children's teeth in and around Pottstown, Pennsylvania. Pottstown is located near Exelon's Limerick Generating Station, two nuclear reactors that began operations in 1984 and 1989. There are 11 other operating nuclear reactors within 80 miles of Pottstown.

The study, also known as the Tooth Fairy Project, tested the teeth from 95 children born after 1979 from three surrounding counties — Berks, Chester and Montgomery. Levels of strontium-90, a radioactive isotope produced by atom bombs and nuclear reactors, were 34 percent higher in teeth from these counties than the rest of Pennsylvania. The average level in teeth from Pottstown was 62 percent higher.

Because strontium-90 is a known cancer-causing carcinogen, the study also examined cancer rates in the area. The tri-county area is shown to have a 94% higher cancer rate among children than national, state, and regional rates. The Pennsylvania Health Department released its own comparison of the same statistics and confirmed many of the study's findings, such as higher rates of breast cancer, brain cancer and leukemia.

The project has collected more than 4,000 baby teeth nationwide, mostly from children living close to nuclear reactors and born after the mid-1980's. The results have shown a correlation between childhood cancer and strontium-90 levels and reduced infant mortality when reactors close. These findings con-

tradict the NRC claim that low levels of radiation emitted by properly operating power reactors do not cause health effects.

— *The [Pottstown] Mercury*, Nov. 19, 2003

## "Hot" Trash Imports: How Much Gets In?

PORT HURON, Mich. — Although U.S. customs agents don't keep a running total, they estimate that two or three trucks per week carrying radioactive garbage attempt to enter the U.S. from Canada via the Blue Water Bridge at Port Huron, Michigan. Michigan imports trash from Canada and dumps it in about seven different landfills. In June, radiation portals that trucks must drive through were installed at the Blue Water Bridge. When an alarm goes off, customs agents sift through the cargo of trash to determine the radioactive source. To date it has been medical waste illegally or mistakenly thrown in among other garbage. Toronto — in response to trucks being turned back and fined — has installed its own monitoring devices and is removing the radioactive trash before trucks reach the border.

— *Detroit News*, Sept. 8, 2003

## Exelon Seeks Approval for New Nuclear Reactor

CLINTON, Illinois — In line with the Bush administration's plan to construct new nuclear power reactors, Exelon Generation Company on September 25 filed a site permit for the land adjacent to the Clinton Nuclear Power Station in Illinois. The request means that Exelon has decided to ignore economic, environmental and emergency planning problems with new reactors. NRC permitting for the site could take up to 33 months.

Early site approval does not authorize construction of a new reactor. Permission to build would require public approval and an operating license for construction and operation. Exelon considers the site a good location because it was originally designed for two reactors where only one was built, and it is already located close to major transmission facilities.

The Student Environmental Action Coalition in Normal, Illinois is organizing a nuclear resistance conference Feb. 20-22. The conference was motivated by the possibility of a new reactor being built at Clinton and will focus on the dangers of nuclear power. — *www.Pantagraph.com*, Sept. 26, 2003

## Sickened Nuclear Workers Stifled by Red Tape

WASHINGTON, DC — According to a report disclosed by the General Accounting Office, the investigative branch of Congress, hundreds of Cold War-era nuclear weapons workers are dying of cancer and other health complications as they wait for medical compensation from a seriously flawed DOE program. As of October, the DOE program had approved only 45 out of 19,000 claims that had been filed. Federal officials said it would take program administrators at least seven years to clear the backlog. The compensation program provides medical care and a payment of \$150,000 to sick workers or their survivors if the workers were exposed to cancer-causing radiation, silica or beryllium during weapons production years.

The DOE program has some fundamental flaws. Workers' claims are paid through workers' compensation insurers, and these insurers cannot be forced to pay. In contrast, the Labor Dept. has a compensation program for nuclear workers that pay claims from a federal fund. Many have advocated a transfer of authority from the DOE program to the Labor Department.

In related news, *USA Today* reported in September that thousands of people were exposed to radiation and other toxic chemicals during the post-weapons production years in nuclear facilities. The DOE will only provide compensation to workers who had jobs while the weapons work was going on. The article says that a yet-to-be released federal study names approximately 100 sites where there was a "high potential" that leftover radiation was significant enough to raise workers' risks of cancer and other illnesses.

— AP, Oct. 2, *Oak Ridger*, Nov. 14, and *USA Today*, Sept. 15, 2003

## RESOURCES

- \* **Coalition for Free Thought in Media**, Web: [www.groups.yahoo.com/group/coalitionforfreethoughtinmedia/](http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/coalitionforfreethoughtinmedia/)
- \* **Committee to Bridge the Gap**,
- \* **Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action**, 16159 Clear Creek Rd NW, Poulsbo, WA 98370, Phone: (360) 779-4672; Email: [info@gzcenter.org](mailto:info@gzcenter.org); Web: [www.gzcenter.org](http://www.gzcenter.org)
- \* **Natural Resources Defense Council**, 40 West 20th Street New York, NY 10011, Phone: (212) 727-2700; Web: [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org)
- \* **Nuclear Free Future Award**, Schellingstr. 24, Munich D-80799 Germany, Web: [www.nuclear-free.com/](http://www.nuclear-free.com/)
- \* **Nuclear Information and Resource Service**, 1424 16th St. NW, #404 Washington, DC 20036, Phone: (202) 328-0002, ex. 14; Web: [www.nirs.org](http://www.nirs.org)
- \* **Pacific Life Research Center**, Web: [www.plrc.org/](http://www.plrc.org/); Email: [bob@plrc.org](mailto:bob@plrc.org)
- \* **Radioactive Waste News**, National Conference of State Legislatures, 7700 E First Place, Denver, CO 80230, Phone: (303) 364-7700; Web: [www.ncsl.org/programs/esnr](http://www.ncsl.org/programs/esnr)
- \* **Snake River Alliance**, 310 East Center, Pocatello, ID 83201, Phone: (208) 234-4782; Email: [sra@snakeriveralliance.org](mailto:sra@snakeriveralliance.org); Web: [www.snakeriveralliance.org](http://www.snakeriveralliance.org)
- \* **Student Environmental Action Coalition**, Normal, Ill., Web: [seac.pabn.org/conference](http://seac.pabn.org/conference); Email: [seac@pabn.org](mailto:seac@pabn.org)
- \* **U.S. Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu**, P.O. Box 43384, Tucson, AZ 85733, Phone/fax: (520) 323-8697; Email: [freevanunu@mindspring.com](mailto:freevanunu@mindspring.com); Web: [www.nonviolence.org/vanunu/](http://www.nonviolence.org/vanunu/)