

NUCLEAR SHORTS

More Accidents at Oak Ridge

OAK RIDGE, Tenn. — Two recent hazardous materials accidents at the Oak Ridge nuclear weapons facility endangered the surrounding neighborhood. On May 8 a chemical fire near the former K-25 uranium enrichment site closed state Highway 58 and forced the evacuation of 150 people living nearby.

Less than a week later on May 14, strontium-90, considered by the Environmental Protection Agency one of the most hazardous of nuclear wastes, was spilled across nearly two miles of Highway 95 in Roane County, Tennessee. It apparently spilled onto the roadway when a tanker traveling between two East Tennessee Department of Energy facilities sprang a leak. Sections of the contaminated asphalt on Highway 95 plus part of an access road had to be torn up and repaved.

More than five hours after the spill occurred, authorities finally closed the road. In a predictable display of U.S. public relations, DOE spokesman Steve Wyatt announced there was no danger to the public. However, officials encouraged anyone who may have driven over the contamination to contact their local health department. A DOE official told Knoxville's Channel 6 news that cost of the cleanup would be "no less than \$1 million and no more than \$2.5 million."

— *Associated Press*, May 16, 2004; *Roane County News*, May 26, 2004; *The Sunflower*, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, June 2004

Navy Attempts Cover-up of Trident Rocket Mishap

BANGOR, Washington — The Navy has refused to discuss a serious accident involving a loaded nuclear missile at the Bangor submarine base in Washington. On November 17 a ladder was mistakenly left inside a Trident C-4 missile tube. As the missile was being off-loaded from a submarine, the ladder punctured a 9-inch hole in the nose cone and came within inches of a nuclear warhead. Despite the Navy's insistence that the accident was never a threat, missile handling operations at the Strategic Weapons Facility Pacific (SWFPAC) were shut down for nine weeks and four top officers at SWFPAC were dismissed.

The local paper, *The Bangor Sun*, attempted to investigate the incident by proposing a series of questions for the Navy. The returned answers failed to even acknowledge that an incident had taken place. The region's two congressmen, U.S. Reps Norm Dicks (D-Belfair) and Jay Inslee (D-Bainbridge Island), were angered by the response and have demanded a full briefing by the Navy.

The Navy has a history of covering up critical accidents involving nuclear weapons. A 1986 missile safety study disclosed that the Navy has created an artificial distinction between the terms "accident" and "incident." While the Navy's 1986 document reports no "accidents" involving Navy missiles, it does document a total of 53 "incidents" prior to 1986, sixteen of which were classified as "potentially serious events; incidents which had the potential to cause nuclear material dispersal." — *The Bangor Sun*, March 12, 2004; *Ground Zero*, Poultsbo, Wash., December 2003

Hot Laundry on the Line

POTTSTOWN, Penn. — A wastewater treatment plant in Royersford, Pennsylvania, has been treating radioactively contaminated water from a nuclear laundry facility. The contaminated water is from UniTech Services, which cleans clothing worn by workers at Exelon Nuclear's Limerick Generation station. The Royersford facility, designed to treat domestic sewage, has been releasing the treated, "clean" water into the Schuylkill River, and storing the remaining radioactive sludge. The waste matter is contaminated with cobalt-60, which releases gamma radiation and can cause cancer and other health problems. As the sludge accumulated so did the cobalt-60. The sludge was then sent on to the nearby Pottstown water treatment station, where it was further "de-watered" and finally sent on to the Bucks County landfill. Upon delivery to the landfill, radiation alarms alerted operators to the danger.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) debated over who was responsible for the radioactive sludge. In the end, the DEP ordered the landfill to bury the toxic sludge. The Pottstown water treatment facility was convinced to de-water the remaining radioactive sludge at the facility as well as an additional 400,000 gallons sitting in a tank at the Royersford plant. The section of sewer line that runs from UniTech to Royersford will need to be cleaned and decontaminated, as will the tanks that hold the sludge. Meanwhile, the nuclear laundry facility has constructed its own wastewater treatment facility on site and has been permitted by the DEP to discharge its waste matter directly into the Schuylkill River. — *Pottstown Mercury*, April 22, 2004; *Norristown Times Herald*, May 22, 2004

Mammograms Increase Cancer Risk

MASSACHUSETTS — Over a third of mammograms give false readings with a 64 percent rate of false positives, according to new research in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Mammogram (X-ray) screening in fact raises the risk of cancer — having just four breast films exposes a woman to one rad (radiation absorbed dose), about 1,000 times more than a chest X-ray. Each rad increases a pre-menopausal woman's cancer risk by one percent. So screening for 10 years raises the cancer risk by 10 percent. Furthermore, says the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, if cancer is present, the extreme compression during mammogram can cause cancer cells to spread.

Breast thermography is a radiation-free diagnostic procedure that images the breast to aid in the early detection of cancer. The procedure, which uses ultra-sensitive infrared cameras, is based on the principle that chemical and blood vessel activity in both pre-cancerous tissue and the area surrounding a developing breast cancer is almost always higher than in the normal breast. Just as each fingerprint is unique, each woman has a unique infrared map of her breasts. Images taken over months and years are analyzed by computers to detect temperature and vascular changes which may indicate an abnormal growth. Because of breast thermography's extreme sensitivity, these changes may be among the earliest signs of breast cancer and/or a pre-cancerous state. — *The Ecologist*, February 2004; See also: www.breastthermography.com

Nuclear Weapons Funding Rivals All-Time High

WASHINGTON D.C. — The Department of Energy's nuclear weapons budget request of \$6.57 billion for fiscal year 2005 almost equals the all-time historic high set under President Reagan during the Cold War. In 1985, Reagan spent \$6.8 billion (calculated to 2003 dollars) during the nuclear weapons arms race with the Soviet Union.

The FY 2005 budget would include funding for research, development, testing and production of nuclear weapons, including \$27 million for the development of the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator — up 270% from 2004. Moreover, the DOE plans to further raise its funding requests for nuclear weapons programs to \$7.5 billion by 2009. In total, the DOE plans to spend \$35.5 billion on nuclear weapons from FY 2005 to FY 2009. This comes at a time when domestic programs are being slashed and the federal deficit is predicted to be \$362 billion in 2005.

— *Nuclear Watch*, Santa Fe, New Mexico; Feb. 5, 2004

Childhood Radiation Blowback

STOCKHOLM — Exposing infants to low doses of ionizing radiation can significantly impair intellectual capacity in later life, a Swedish study has found. Researchers at Stockholm's Karolinska Institute examined 3,094 men who had received radiation treatment for haemangioma between 1930 and 1959, before they were 18 months old. Haemangioma is a condition caused by excessive growth of blood vessels in the skin and is often found in babies. The marks it causes tend to vanish of their own accord within a few years, but they can also be removed; in the past low-intensity X-rays were used for this purpose.

The researchers found that the more radiation the infant boys were given, the lower their subsequent intellectual level. A significant dose-related response was seen in the results of cognitive tests with those given the highest doses of radiation scoring less well on the intelligence tests given when they were called up for national service at 18. — *The Ecologist*, Feb. 2004

Rocky Cleanup at Rocky Flats

DENVER, Colo. — "Cleanup" contractor Kaiser-Hill, Inc. plans to blow up contaminated buildings at Rocky Flats and leave the radioactive basements, topped with debris, buried six feet under. The company says the detonations will protect workers. Area residents fear the wind-borne spread of radiation. Kaiser-Hill denies that off-site contamination will occur because it plans to spray glue on the plutonium-contaminated basement walls and cover them with dirt before collapsing the superstructures. To reduce other contamination at the site, glue was sprayed on plutonium-tainted equipment before it was cut up for transport.

Speed is paramount in dealing with the unstable plutonium, which spontaneously combusts when exposed to air.

Building 371, one of those slated for demolition, is seriously contaminated, partly because 1,200 gallons of radioactive water spilled there in 1992. In Building 771 — rated the most dangerous in the U.S. for its leaking plutonium — workers scraped through the concrete to metal rebar and still haven't removed all the contamination. Every cranny of Building 776/777 is radioactive due to a 1969 fire. The building is set to be cut up and shipped to the Nevada Test Site which is not yet a licensed nuclear dump. Part of the "cleanup" involves shipping more than 70 percent of the plutonium-contaminated waste to Georgia, Nevada, Utah and New Mexico. Hundreds of suspect sites are being dug up as former workers told of the illegal and undocumented midnight dumping of radioactive waste.

Kaiser-Hill is hoping for half a billion dollars in profit. Restoration and cleanup costs as of Dec. 31 were estimated at \$6.75 billion. The DOE spends more than \$2 million per day for "restoration" work that employs 4,500 people.

Rocky Flats produced 70,000 nuclear bomb cores. Five buildings on site were considered some of the most radioactive on earth. — *Rocky Mountain News*, May 15, 2004

Hunger Strikers Oppose Nuclear Reactor Plans

MADURA, East Java, Indonesia — On April 28, thirteen students from Trunojoyo University in Madura, Indonesia, were successful in a hunger strike demanding that their university

withdraw from an impact study for the development of a nuclear reactor in Madura. The concerned students began their hunger strike on April 22, Earth Day. "The project and those doing research to support it should be opposed," one student explained. "It would be detrimental to the people of Madura."

The students won the support of many organizations and individuals, including local politicians, Muslim clerics and environmentalists. Six days after the hunger strike began, the university officially stated their withdrawal from the planned study and promised to stay clear of any related activities.

Within the past two years, the Indonesian government has made plans to build two nuclear power reactors; one in Jepara, Central Java and the other in Madura, East Java. The Muria reactor is scheduled to commence in 2011 despite the fact that the Muria Mountain may become volcanically active. The construction of the Madura reactor is scheduled to begin in 2008. — *Jakarta Post*, April 26, 2004

Radioactive Wastewater Spills Into Rhine

KARLSRUHE, Germany — On April 28 about 8,000 gallons of radioactive water poured into the Rhine River in Germany after a pump malfunctioned at a nuclear reactor. Dirk Ommeln, of Energie Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany's third largest power company, said the water leaked into the river when a valve was mistakenly left open. "The water was lightly contaminated," said Ommeln, who likened the radioactivity exposure of drinking a gallon of the water to having a dental X-ray.

The 7,900-gallon leak was not reported to the state Environment Ministry for three days, prompting criticism from the local government, which requires immediate reporting for all incidents. The ministry and power company both contended that the contamination was not strong enough to pose a health risk. The spill occurred during testing of high-speed valves that move wastewater into tanks. An unexpected increase in pressure blew out one valve, allowing the contaminated water to enter the Rhine.

— *Associated Press*, April 28, 2004

Radioactive Runoff from Uranium Site

PORTSMOUTH, Ohio — Water samples from streams and culverts draining from the Piketon uranium enrichment factory show heavy contamination. A local group, Portsmouth/Piketon Residents for Environmental Safety, hired a Russian nuclear physicist, Sergei Paschenko, to examine the runoff. Lab results show beta radiation 100 times higher than so-called naturally occurring background levels. The U.S. Enrichment Corp., which processes uranium ore into usable form for reactor fuel and nuclear weapons, said its water samples never exceeded allowable limits. The company even said that groundwater leached from residential septic systems, naturally occurring radon and potassium in agricultural fertilizer could be causing the dangerous levels of contamination. The high levels of radiation were found in water from an underground pipe that carries it from the facility into streams that eventually feed the Scioto River.

"In Russia, that would qualify as medium-level waste," Paschenko told the Chillicothe, Ohio *Gazette*, referring to the high level of radiation in some samples.

— *Chillicothe, Ohio Gazette*, Nov. 20, 2003

U.S. Conducts Another Plutonium Bomb Test

JACKASS FLATS, Nevada — On May 25, 2004, the National Nuclear Security Administration conducted another nuclear weapons test at the Nevada Test Site (NTS), 85 miles northwest of Las Vegas. U.S. officials claim that the test was crucial to producing "essential scientific data and technical information used to help maintain the safety and reliability of the nuclear weapons stockpile."

The explosion took place 963 feet below ground and detonated high explosives around plutonium encased in a steel sphere while x-rays, radar and lasers charted the behavior of the plutonium — the toxic radioactive core of the H-bomb, now manufactured at Los Alamos. The test was the 21st so-called "sub-critical" type conducted at the NTS.

According to the White House, the tests do not violate the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty because they do not result in a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction. However, the U.S. government refuses to allow international monitors to observe the tests.

Although the U.S. has observed a nuclear testing moratorium since 1992, the Bush White House has requested funds to upgrade the test site and decrease the time needed to prepare full-scale bomb blasts, generating concerns that the resumption of nuclear testing is on the horizon.

The move toward openly violating the test ban may be connected to the current research on a new generation of nuclear weapons. The tests are said to concern the W-88 Trident warheads. The cost to taxpayers is upwards of \$30 million. — *The Sunflower*, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Issue 85, June 2004; *ABC news on-line*, May 26; & *Albuquerque Journal*, May 15, 2004



Your Honor, we feel the trial failed to deliver on its pretrial publicity