

NUCLEAR SHORTS

Rollover Throws Drums of Rad Material from Truck

AMMA, West Virginia — On the morning of Feb. 20, 2008, a truck's rollover accident saw two 60-gallon drums containing highly radioactive cesium-137 and cobalt-60 tossed onto Interstate 79 in Roane County, West Virginia. The driver and his sole passenger were working for the National Security Technologies of Nevada, and were contracted by the Department of Energy (DOE) to haul the material from an anti-terrorism training facility in West Virginia to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. According to the DOE, the material in the barrels was used for DOE radiation detection exercises at the Center for National Response, operated by the National Guard and Pentagon. No serious injuries were reportedly caused by the rollover and, according to a National Security Technologies spokesperson, tests found no indication of leakage.

— *Charleston Daily Mail*, Feb. 21 & March 5, 2008

France Cozying Up to the Algeria it Bombed

VIENNA — Eleven years ago, the International Atomic Energy Agency called on all nuclear armed States to accept responsibility for radioactive contamination left from their Bomb tests. France conducted 17 tests in French-occupied Algeria in the 1960s, four above ground, the rest below. At least four of those experiments released radioactive gases and, afterwards, locals fell ill. Elevated radiation levels still persist at three test sites where fission products mixed with molten rock. A new study of contamination and health consequences may be conducted and France may contribute to clean up costs "if necessary." France planted millions of landmines during its occupation of Algeria and, in another recent attempt to improve relations between the two nations, finally handed over maps of their locations.

— *Reuters*, February 28; *Earth Island Journal*, December 3, 2007; IAEA, Vienna, 2005

Nuclear Workers Killed at Pakistani Reactor

PAKISTAN — The explosion of a cylinder of poisonous hydrogen sulphide gas started a fire at the military's Khushab plutonium production reactor southeast of Islamabad. "After the blast, the building caught fire," the local police chief told the AP. "Two men sustained burns and died on the way to a hospital," he said. After the fire, a nearby town and hundreds of other workers were evacuated from within a radius of 16 kilometers. The site contains three reactors and is suspected of producing plutonium for Pakistan's nuclear weapons arsenal. — *Associated Press*, *BBC*, *PakistaniDefense.com*, & *ExpressIndia.com*, April 8, 2008

Tracking Wasted Animals

HANFORD, Washington — Animals in and around the 560 square-mile Hanford nuclear weapons production site in southeastern Washington have been attracted to the radioactive salts that remain after decades of nuclear waste reprocessing. The reprocessing saw extremely radioactive liquids disposed of in underground tanks or surface trenches — over 50 million gallons during the Cold War. Animals crisscrossing the area eat contaminated plants and drink contaminated water. Larger animals eat smaller ones and those large animals excrete literally radioactive waste across the great expanse of the state's southeastern desert. Some cleanup proposals for the Hanford site estimate that 237,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil need to be dug up, diluted 3 parts-to-1 with clean soil and stored in a landfill somewhere off site. — *Tri City Herald & Seattle Times*, March 28, 2008

Worker Contaminated at Sabia, Inc.

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho — An employee of Sabia, Inc, a private company under license by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, inhaled an unknown amount of strontium-90 while extracting the material from a gauge. The affected worker sought medical help and was released from the hospital a week later. No other workers were contaminated, Savia reported. The company prepares the gauges for "proper" dumping. Emergency management officials said that Sabia has closed and secured the building and has been assessing the best method of re-entering it in order to conduct a cleanup. — *Idaho Press-Tribune & AP*, March 2, 2008

Uranium Processor Pleads Guilty to Killing Birds

DENVER, Colorado — On March 12, representatives of Cotter Corporation's uranium processing facility near Canon City pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court for its role in the poisoning death of some 40 geese and ducks. On October 21, 2005, some 4,500 gallons of organic solvent the company uses to extract uranium and vanadium from leached uranium ore, were spilled into a containment pond where the migratory birds stopped over and were killed. Cotter Corp. was sentenced under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to the maximum fine of \$15,000, told to "make additional restitution of \$15,000" (to the birds' families?) and to implement an environmental compliance plan designed to prevent future spills or to clean them up if accidents occur. — *PRNewswire*, *Denver Post*, March 12, 2008

Sarkozy Calls French Nuclear Arsenal "Life Insurance"

PARIS — Toward the end of March 2008, President Nicolas Sarkozy announced that France would be reducing the size of its nuclear arsenal to half the total number of warheads

reached during the Cold War. The cuts would reduce airborne nuclear weapons by a third, leaving the majority of French H-bombs onboard submarines. Sarkozy promised that France would not be "defenseless," stating that its nuclear deterrent was also its "life-insurance policy" against various nuclear threats in Asia and the Middle East. The irony of his warhead reduction pledge could not be missed as it was delivered at the inauguration of a new nuclear-armed submarine aptly named *Le Terrible*. — *BBC News & The International Herald Tribune*, March 21, 2008

Bush: Nukes Good for Bulgaria, Bad for Iran

SOFIA, Bulgaria — In an effort to expand U.S. influence in Eastern Europe, the Bush Administration has gained the support of the Bulgarian Cabinet to fund an experimental nuclear reactor to be built near the Pentagon's three bases already inside the country. While the White House threatens Iran because of its pursuit of nuclear power, the Bush Administration wants to extend financial and technical assistance worth \$5.5 million to the Bulgarian Academy of Science for the same. As part of the agreement, the Department of Energy will help the academy export its nuclear waste to Russia and provide funds for a safety system covering the reactor and its waste storage site.

— *Xinhu & Sofia Novinite*, March 12, 2008

Court Orders Cleanup of Military Rad Waste Dumps

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — A three-judge panel of the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a lower court decision ordering the DOE to clean up buried nuclear waste at the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory (INEL). The ruling found against the DOE which claimed it was obliged to dispose of only "transuranic" waste stored in barrels above ground since 1970. The courts ruled that the DOE is responsible for disposal of all the waste at the site, including some put into cardboard boxes and drums and dumped into unlined pits and trenches between 1954 and 1970. About 60,000 cubic meters of this buried waste originated at the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons factory near Denver, Colorado and were shipped to INEL during the 1950s and 1960s. The estimated cost of the INEL cleanup, to be finished by 2018, ranges enormously from \$57 million to \$13.5 billion. — *Idaho Falls Post Register*, May 21; *Times-News Magic Valley*, March 25, 2008; the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality

50,000 Tons of Radwaste Threaten Missouri River Basin

BRIDGETON, Missouri — The West Lake Landfill, closed in 1995 and located one mile from the Earth City levee in St. Louis, Missouri, contains as much as 50,000 tons of radioactive waste which was illegally dumped in 1973. The waste resulted from uranium ore processing at the Mallinckrodt Chemical Works. The dump sits in the flood plain and would contaminate the Missouri River with uranium, thorium, radium and polonium-210, should the levee fail. The river provides drinking water for about 20 percent of St. Louis' population and the water intake is just 8 miles downstream from the poisonous trash. According to the Missouri Coalition for the Environment, radiation migrated off-site after erosion exposed the radioactive products. Isotopes have shown up in groundwater samples. The site falls under the Environmental Protection Agency's beleaguered Superfund program which has increasingly undergone budget cuts. As a result, nothing has been done to remove the deadly radioactive waste. The EPA has suggested spending \$22 million to dump rubble, clay and stones on top of the waste, rather than a minimum of \$75 million to remove it. Meanwhile, the levee ages. — *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 27 & 28; *KSDK TV*, May 27, 2008; *The St. Louis Journalism Review*, Feb. 1, 2007; Missouri Coalition for the Environment

Unwarned Federal Lab. Workers Deliberately Exposed

LIVERMORE, Calif. — Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) exposed 178 of its workers to dangerous levels of beryllium between 2002 and 2006 without their knowledge. Beryllium, a hazardous non-radioactive metal used in nuclear weapons, can cause fatal lung disease. In Feb. 2007, tests showed high beryllium levels in machine shop than previous studies revealed. The high levels were reconfirmed in July '07, but the shop's contractor was not notified until January 2008 — six months after the fact and a year since high levels were first recorded. "We absolutely could have and should have informed the employees about this sooner," Lab Spokeswoman Susan Houghton confessed to the press. The LLNL has arranged for all current and former contract workers to receive blood tests to establish exposure levels. The lab has known of the beryllium danger for years, because radiation monitors, in storage, registered elevated beryllium as early as 2005. — *The Daily Californian*, Feb. 12; *Contra Costa Times*, Feb. 2, 2008; GAO report, 01-476R, 2001

"Hot" Milk With Your Tea?

CUMBRIA, England — Elevated concentrations of radioactive iodine-129 have been detected in cow's milk from farms in the vicinity of the UK's Sellafield nuclear complex in Cumbria, according to the site's own analyses. British officials also report that the thyroid-seeking iodine-129 has entered the food chain. The Environmental Agency issued assurances that there has

been no health risk from the radioactive iodine, yet it claims to be mystified about how radioiodine got into the milk supply. Iodine-129 is a byproduct of Sellafield's reprocessing of nuclear fuel. Its THORP reprocessing facility was shut down in 2005 following the discovery of a 20 metric ton leak of plutonium, uranium and nitric acid (that continued undetected for eight months). THORP was recently allowed to resume operations, even without certain safety certificates for crucial equipment. "There is no obvious explanation for the increase," the Environment Agency's Andrew Mayall said, laughably. THORP claims not to know how the iodine-129 reached a local farm because, its officials are quick to point out, waste iodine-129 is normally dumped in the Irish sea. — *The Whitehaven News & The Farmer's Weekly Interactive*, April 16, 2008

Reactors Dumped in Russia's Kara Sea

MOSCOW — An emergency team of 85 scientists has been rushed to the Kara Sea in northwest Russia to assess the situation at what is reported to be an "underwater facility." Russian newspapers report that 138 air, ground and under-sea nuclear weapons tests were detonated in the area which has since become a radwaste dumpsite, and that 13 propulsion reactors removed from Soviet submarines were dumped there as well. With their radiation endangering Norway and Russia, some of the reactors cannot even be located. Researchers have found what they called "minor" excesses of radiation on the sea floor. The presence of up to 3.5 trillion cubic meters of natural gas has drawn the attention of prospectors to the area.

— *RIA Novosti*, April 11; *Barents Observer*, April 4, 2008

Worker Radiation Exposures Hidden, Understated

OAK RIDGE, Tennessee — So much radioactive waste has been buried at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory that the DOE is actually contemplating "mining" 41 million pounds of buried uranium waste. This nuclear weapons fabrication complex is a quagmire of radioactive contamination and workers continue to be recklessly exposed. On January 16, six employees of a waste-processing facility run by DOE contractor EnergySolutions were contaminated with uranium-232, U-233 and thorium-229. The accident, which the company blamed on incorrect labeling, occurred when workers opened a package of powdery uranium (labeled as "discs") delivered from Ohio. The shipper, US Enrichment Corp. in Ohio, claimed on Feb. 3 that only three workers were exposed and announced that "there

was some exposure to the workers, who have turned out to be OK." Mike Johnson, president of EnergySolutions' commercial facilities group admitted on Feb. 13 that, "We tested a total of six." One worker received internal alpha contamination, with an estimated radiation dose of 2.8 rems, more than half the annual limit for nuclear workers, Johnson said. In a Jan. 17 letter, the chairman of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board said problems with the facility's safety documents identified two years ago have not been fully

corrected and "may lead to improper classification of safety systems and less than adequate protection of the public and workers." — *Knoxnews.com*, April 28, Feb. 13, 15 & Jan. 31; *Pike County News Watchman*, Feb. 3; & Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, March 28, 2008

Cameco Warns of Lake Ontario Contamination

OTTAWA, Canada — Cameco, the world's largest uranium mining company, has warned that Lake Ontario may now be contaminated with uranium, arsenic and fluorides from its Port Hope refinery if their computer modeling is correct. The site has been closed since July in order to remove contaminated soil under the structure that has leaked into an adjacent harbor that links directly to Lake Ontario. The refinery is in the center of town, in the flood plain on the lakefront and has poisoned residential groundwater. It has gone through several cleanups since it opened in the 1930s. The current cleanup effort has cost \$18 million and is not yet completed. Cameco expects to reopen after cleanup even if the site has contaminated Lake Ontario. — *International Herald Tribune*, May 22; *CTV.ca* (Canada), May 21, 2008

RESOURCES

- * **Alliance for Nuclear Accountability**, 322 4th Street NE, Washington, DC 20002; (202) 544-0217; Web: ananuclear.org
- * **Beyond Nuclear**, 6930 Carroll Ave., Suite 400, Takoma Park, MD 20912; (301) 270-2209; Email: info@beyondnuclear.org; Web: beyondnuclear.org
- * **Center for Food Safety**, 660 Pennsylvania Ave., SE, Suite 302, Washington, DC 20003; Web: centerforfoodsafety.org; (202) 547-9359
- * **Food and Water Watch**, 1616 P St. NW, #300, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 683-2500; Web: foodandwaterwatch.org 08739
- * **Institute for Energy & Environmental Research**, 6935 Laurel Ave., # 201, Takoma Park, MD 20912; (310) 270-5500; Email: ieer@ieer.org; Web: www.ieer.org
- * **Grandmothers Mothers & More For Energy Safety**, P.O. Box 923, Normandy Beach, NJ 08739
- * **Missouri Coalition for the Environment**, 6267 Delmar Blvd. Ste. 2E, St. Louis, MO 63130; (314) 727-0600; Email: moenviron@moenviron.org; Web: <http://www.moenviron.org/>
- * **Nebraskans for Peace StratCom Watch Committee**, P.O. Box 6418, Omaha, NE 68106; Web: nebraskansforpeace.org; (402) 475-4620; Email: nfpstate@nebraskansforpeace.org
- * **Nevada Desert Experience**, 1420 W. Bartlett Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106; Email: info@nevadadesertexperience.org; (702) 646-4814; Web: www.nevadadesertexperience.org
- * **Nuclear Information & Resource Service**, 6930 Carroll Ave., # 340, Takoma Park, MD 20912; (301) 270-6477; Email: nirnet@nirs.org; Web: nirs.org