

GAINSSAYER

NEWSLETTER FOR GEORGIANS AGAINST NUCLEAR ENERGY

FALL 1988

HOT TIMES ON THE GEORGIA/ SOUTH CAROLINA BORDER

"It will do precious little good to protect ourselves from the Soviets if, in the process, we poison or irradiate our own people." Sen. John Glenn, one of several lawmakers seeking tighter controls at Department of Energy nuclear plants.

Even a light study of the Savannah River Nuclear Plant reveals alarming problems:

- 51 immense tanks of high-level radioactive waste corrode precariously over the Tuscaloosa aquifer (drinking water for several states including Georgia).
- A highly toxic chemical solvent (trichlorethylene) has leaked into the Tuscaloosa aquifer.
- The four reactors at SRP operated for six years without sufficient containment to withstand an accident. Power has been cut drastically three times to bring to a containable level as DuPont (plant operators) and Department of Energy (plant owners) attempt to agree on appropriate nuclear management.
- DuPont researchers found faulty assumptions to underlie emergency system design.
- SRP, as are all weapons plants, is exempt from safety and environmental regulation, for reasons of national security.
- Streams near the plant have more than 750 times the limit of radioactivity allowed for drinking water.
- Low-level radioactive waste and toxic chemicals kept in shallow, unlined bins since the 1950s are leeching into the soil and groundwater.

The Bomb Plant in Our Back Yard

In the 1950s, the Atomic Energy Commission secured 300 square miles of the swampy Georgia-South Carolina border for the U.S. Department of Energy's weapons production plant — more specifically, the reactors which manufacture plutonium and tritium for nuclear weapons.

DuPont operates the plant on a not-for-profit basis. They have not renewed their contract and will no longer operate the plant after 1989 because of the plant's safety liability.

The Department of Energy owns and manages the plant and has been unregulated by any outside safety agency for 30 years. They are caretakers of 33,000,000 gallons of radioactive liquid and sludge and vast quantities of toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes. They have not been subject to any environmental regulation. Allowed to set their own priorities, waste management has not been high on the glamour list.

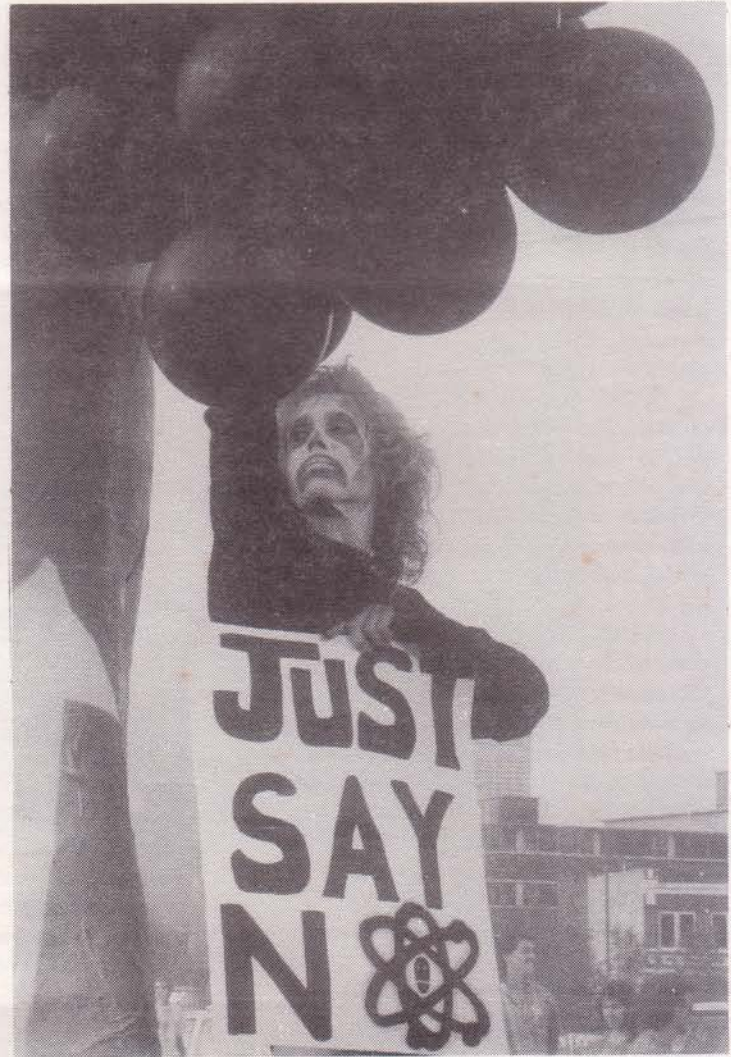


Photo by L.P. McEachern

The Savannah River Plant has been impacting the surrounding ecology for 30 years. Besides the waste storage and disposal problems, there have been periodic radioactive releases into the atmosphere and river. The plant is especially susceptible to serious accident because, like Chernobyl, it does not have a concrete containment dome.

SRP is popular in its neighborhood because of the 14,000 jobs it provides. United States Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina is pressing the Department of Energy for new reactors to be constructed there. Maybe he thinks his constituency will appreciate the economic boon and forgive the ecological disasters.

The Savannah River Plant is not, however, an issue which affects only South Carolina. Georgia's citizens have high stakes in decisions surrounding this old nuclear plant and will do well to watch developments with care.

Who and What Is G.A.N.E.?

Georgians Against Nuclear Energy (GANE) is a non-profit citizens' group established in 1978 to oppose nuclear power in Georgia, expose the many dangers of the nuclear fuel cycle and to promote the use of safe, renewable, natural energy sources. GANE has since expanded its goals to include opposition to the development, proliferation and use of nuclear weapons.

To these ends, GANE holds periodic information/education meetings, distributes literature, publishes the **GAIN-SAYER**, monitors public hearings, communicates with city and state officials, holds monthly membership meetings and organizes peaceful protests at appropriate places and times.

GANE's members include a broad cross-section of active environmentalists as well as "regular" citizens who devote as much time as individual schedules allow to GANE's projects. These extra-ordinary individuals are GANE's backbone and life-blood, and provide the strength behind the voice.

GANE is a 100% volunteer organization, with no paid staff members, and therefore relies on the energy and commitment of its members. Fundraisers are held occasionally to raise much needed capital to carry out GANE's goals and objectives. Much of GANE's revenue comes from the sale of anti-nuclear, pro-environment buttons, postcards and bumper stickers. Private, individual contributions is the other source upon which GANE is dependent for the financial resources to carry out its educational goals.

Do you have what it takes to be a Georgian Against Nuclear Energy?

- 1) Do you want to know more about nuclear energy or have knowledge you would like to share?
- 2) Do you want to do something besides be a victim in the nuclear nightmare? (Check-writing is considered political activism!)
- 3) Is there something we're not doing with which you can help?

If you agree with GANE's goals and realize that groups like ours are crucial to provide a united voice to our legislators and to the nuclear industry — join GANE! Or help any way you can . . . there's still time to choose!

Educate Yourself About the Savannah River Plant!

Safety and waste problems and the necessity of building a new tritium reactor are expected to be hot topics on the agenda at a pro/con forum about the Savannah River Nuclear Plant this fall.

Bob Alvarez of the Environmental Policy Institute based in Washington, DC, and Frances Hart, director of the Energy Research Foundation of Columbia, SC, will sit on the panel. The U.S. Department of Energy who owns the reactor complex, and DuPont who has managed it for 30 years are sending representation as well.

Sally Sears, political reporter for WAGA-TV, will moderate the event. GANE is co-sponsor with the Georgia Environmental Council (GEC).

At press time other confirmed sponsors include; American Friends Service Committee - Regional Disarmament Program, Atlanta Friends Meeting, Atlanta Peace Alliance, Campaign for a Prosperous

Georgia, Coastal Citizens for a Clean Environment, Georgia Conservancy, Georgia Clean & Beautiful, Georgia Environmental Project, Georgia Organic Growers Association, Georgians Against Nuclear Energy, Greenpeace, Lawyers' Alliance for Nuclear Arms Control, Menonite Central Committee/Atlanta Unit, National Lawyers Guild/Atlanta Chapter, Nature Connection, Nuclear Freeze/Jobs with Peace, Open Door Community, Peace Tree, Rural Americans Working for Arms Reduction, Sierra Club/Georgia Chapter, Unitarian Universalist Congregation.

The forum will be held on Thursday, October 20, 1988, at 7:30 PM at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Cliff Valley Way/NE, Expressway Access Road.

Please contact GANE for more information.

Resurrecting The Case Against Financing Vogtle I Georgia Power Caught Red-Handed!

Georgia Power's been making front page news lately with their tax fraud scandal. Everybody's becoming aware of what we've known all along — that this public utility monopoly systematically misrepresents the facts for their own profit, and at the expense of the consumer.

Tape recordings of personnel conversations which were made for the IRS by a Georgia Power employee have revealed that pertinent information on Georgia Power taxes was kept on personal computers in the employees' homes where it was considered safe from the prying eyes of IRS auditors.

Fortunately for us, references were also made to the methods used to conceal information from the Public Service Commission in the Vogtle I rate case.

A staff member at the Public Service Commission has stated off the record that reconsideration of the Vogtle I rate case seems inevitable.

Campaign for a Prosperous Georgia will intervene at the Public Service Commission but urgently needs funding to do so. If you can help, call them at 404/659-5675.

NUKE NEWS

• Georgia's consumer group Campaign for a Prosperous Georgia has petitioned the Public Service Commission (7/11/88) to halt financing for Vogtle 2 because a study commissioned by the Public Service Commission has shown that it is

\$200,000,000 cheaper not to finish construction.

- The Nuclear Regulatory Commission fined Virginia Power \$100,000 for safety violations at its Surry nuclear plant, including a May incident in which three workers were exposed to radiation because a supervisor "lost track of the time."
- J. Nelson Grace, Nuclear Regulatory Commission's regional administrator in Atlanta retires September 30, 1988. Grace was supervisor of 10 Southeastern states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. During his tenure he shutdown TVA's Browns Ferry and insisted on major changes at Georgia Tech, but was criticized for not noticing Georgia Power's problems with Plant Hatch.
- 8/9/88. Workers trying to start a reactor closed since April at the Savannah River Plant in Aiken, SC raised the reactor's power level to a point where controlled nuclear fission was supposed to happen — but it didn't. Experts say the operators should have immediately shut down the reactor since they did not know what was wrong. Instead, in a very dangerous procedure, operators kept increasing the power level until the plant started. The incident shows "a very bad attitude about safety," according to John F. Ahearne, head of the U.S. Department of Energy safety board. The safety board learned about the incident a full week after it happened — from a reporter!

G.A.N.E. STEPS OUT!



Photo by W.C. Brown



Photo by W.C. Brown



Photo by Tom Meyer

More than 25 GANers stayed up late nights to create an art statement about nuclear power! GANE joined other artists and protesting groups in Art Pluribus Unum's "stART Making Sense" parade. We performed from Central City Park to the official protest stage July 21, 1988 during the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta.



Photo by W.C. Brown

YES! I'd rather be active than radioactive!

\$ 5 Active!

\$10 Active!

\$25 Active!

\$50 Active!

_____ Active!

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Call me about actions!

Fill out and return today before it's too hot! **Georgians Against Nuclear Energy**
P.O. Box 8574 • Station F • Atlanta, GA 30306 • 404/525-7306

TECH REACTOR TO RE-OPEN?

Public Hearing Called For

Georgia Tech has one of the most expensive toys in town. Smack dab in the middle of Atlanta sits the Georgia Tech Nuclear Reactor. It's been a symbol of Tech's shining image as a leader in technology. Its ultimate cost to the surrounding metro area is yet to be tallied.

This "sports car" of the technical world is 25 years old and fast becoming more of a liability than an asset to Tech's public image.

"I have seen my share of blunders in the time I've been employed here," says one reactor employee. Indeed, the blunder we most remember is probably the case of the contaminated worker who rode the MARTA bus home after work and didn't report that he had been involved in a radioactive spill until he reported to work the next day.

What was so important as to risk the safety of Atlanta's bus-riding public? The visual enhancement of a gemstone (topaz).

Spills and accidents are not new to the reactor. In 1983, for example, some 2,700 gallons of radioactive water was released accidentally and ended up in the Atlanta sewer system (*Technique* 2/11/83). The total radiation released was well above the Environmental Protection Agency's safety standards.

Early this year, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) charged Tech with 25 safety violations at the reactor in 1987 and cited "sloppy management" as the cause. The NRC then ordered a partial shutdown of the plant in February, 1988. The new Tech president, John Crecine responded by voluntarily closing the entire reactor operation until numerous safety problems were corrected.

Although Crecine has since considered permanent shutdown of the facility, pressures to keep it open were apparently too strong, and on August 19 of this year, Crecine requested permission from the NRC to reopen the reactor, citing changes made to improve operations.

The NRC has delayed a decision on Tech's request pending further investigation into the firings of two reactor employees who expressed concern about safety.

In fact, Crecine's request to the NRC did not answer a number of serious questions about the problems of reopening the reactor:

- How can the second largest research reactor in the U.S. be allowed to operate in such a highly populated urban area?
- Why should the plant use uranium which is so concentrated that it is suitable for nuclear bombs? How can such fuel be safely transported through Atlanta neighborhoods?
- How can Tech retain the same reactor director who fired employees for reporting safety concerns and who called concerns about bomb-grade fuel "kind of silly"?
- Why does it make sense to choose the lower cost of operating the reactor over the higher cost of decommissioning when decommissioning is clearly somewhere in the reactor's future?
- Can the use of the reactor be justified for its contributions to science and society? The reactor has a long history of under-use, and interest in nuclear studies has slackened in recent years with the nuclear industry's decline.
- The Tech reactor is almost 25 years old. What effect does that have on its

safety?

GANE has joined other citizens and environmental groups in the Atlanta area in requesting that the NRC hold a public hearing on this reactor's possible reopening to address these and other questions. If you are interested in participating in this effort or planning other actions, call GANE at 525-7306.

To write the NRC requesting a hearing: Dr. J. Nelson Grace, Regional Administrator, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Region II, 101 Marietta Street, Atlanta, Georgia 30323.



ATOMIC PRIMER

Don't we need nuclear power to replace expensive oil and to achieve energy independence?

Oil is seldom used for generating electricity — most of it goes for transportation. And nuclear power provides less than 6% of all energy consumed in the U.S., and only about 17% of our electricity. Although some areas rely more heavily on nuclear power than others, if no reactors had operated in 1985, utilities still could have produced on average 16% more power than their customers needed. While we will need more electricity in the future, this reserve margin gives us the time to develop an environmentally sound and efficient mix of energy resources.

SOURCE: *Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS)*, 1424 16th Street NW, Suite 601, Washington, D.C. 20036. 202/328-0002.

GAINSAYER
GEORGIANS AGAINST NUCLEAR ENERGY
P.O. BOX 8574 • STATION F
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30306 • 404/525-7306