

GAINSAYER

NEWSLETTER for GEORGIANS AGAINST NUCLEAR ENERGY

SUMMER 1990

CHERNOBYL The Nuclear Accident That Never Ended

Sad, sad news is coming from the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the Chernobyl accident four years ago.

Anatoly Grishchenko, the heroic pilot who tried to douse the fire, flying through the intensely radioactive gas cloud above the smoldering Chernobyl plant, has died of radiation-induced leukemia. Two million people are being moved from Byelorussia, the Soviet republic which received 70 percent of the fallout from the accident. The Soviet Union says it will take more than 200 years to clean up the damage and has requested international aid.

The Soviet government, prior to deciding to evacuate the two million citizens in the radiated areas, has conducted a program to send certain children and their mothers to an old Soviet resort to breathe uncontaminated air and eat uncontaminated food for two weeks.

Although radiation-caused cancers are expected to occur after a 10-to-20-year latency period, the children are currently suffering chronic pneumonia and headaches.

In response to a Soviet mothers' organization's international call for help, Cuban President Fidel Castro has endorsed a plan that will bring 10,000 young Chernobyl victims to Cuba to be treated in an ambitious program that could last for years.

The first wave of 139 children who went to Cuba in March were suffering from thyroid disorders, tumors, leukemia, lymphoma and skin diseases. They had thickened necks, debilitating headaches, irritability and loss of appetite.



Nuclear Power Will Get You If You Don't Watch Out!

© 1988 Glenn Carroll

Some have lost their hair from chemotherapy.

Four million Soviet citizens are living on contaminated ground and most of Europe is affected by the spilled radioactivity.

A U.S. doctor who consulted in the Soviet Union said the Soviets did not believe they knew the full extent of the problems.

Byelorussia has no nuclear power plants. Chernobyl is in the Ukraine. Until very recently the Soviets continued to operate the three reactors that were still operable at Chernobyl using crews that worked only a two-week shift.

The workers received a *maximum lifetime dose of radiation exposure in two weeks*, and were paid a premium wage.

Anti-nuclear sentiment in the U.S.S.R. is high and said to be well-organized.

Face it -- our worst nuclear nightmare has happened. What can you do about Chernobyl? Get involved! Write to your public officials and tell them of your concerns about effects of radiation on your health. And support Georgians Against Nuclear Energy (GANE) and other organizations which work to remove the nuclear threat from the world.

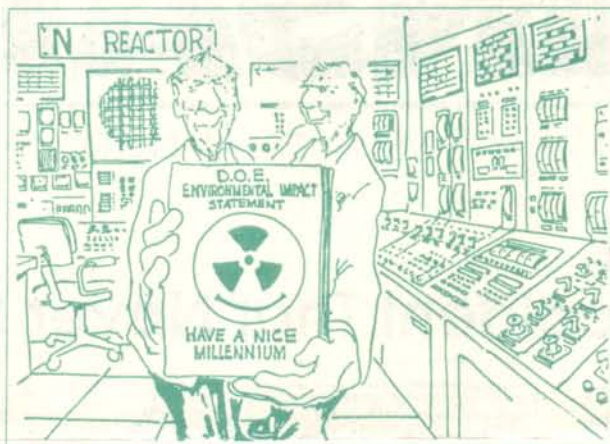
SAVANNAH RIVER PLANT

The Savannah River Plant is a U.S. nuclear bomb plant in South Carolina on the Georgia border. Savannah River Plant, or SRP, continues to be controversial as the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), owner of the plant, stubbornly insists it can overcome its problems and restart its disabled reactors. SRP reactors ceased production of plutonium and tritium over two years ago for profound safety reasons.

Meanwhile, mainstream media are providing the public with outrageous and condemning information that should convince any thinking person to keep the plant closed permanently.

A recent news item reported that DOE is aware of its employees' frequent drug use and safety lapses. In one serious case, a backup pump needed to deliver cooling water to one of the reactors may have been unusable for the past five years because of missing wiring.

The Savannah River Plant uses a containment system like Chernobyl's. There is effectively no barrier to radiation releases to the environment in the event of the overheating of nuclear fuel



© Tom Whittemore

that would result from a lack of cooling water.

The DOE recently conducted an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) on SRP. The study is in itself a victory for environmentalists who sued for the study last year.

In the public hearings attending the summary draft release of the EIS, citizens testified in overwhelming numbers to keep the reactors shut down.

According to a recent article in the Atlanta Journal & Constitution, the DOE "acknowledges that if the reactors aren't restarted, releases of tritium-tainted water would be eliminated, groundwater contamination would be reduced, wetlands would recover, fish

kills due to hot-water discharges would stop, and cancer and other health risks would diminish." Energy officials add that 9,600 jobs will end. And yet, the report says, the need for tritium to make H-bombs is acute. This, in light of the so-called thaw in the cold war.

Tritium is radioactive hydrogen and has a relatively short half-life of about 12 years. Eventually all the bombs that use tritium will need a recharge to maintain their explosive force.

With enough firepower to destroy the world many times over and only 6% of the arsenal being partially disabled each year at the decay rate of tritium, more bombs won't make me feel safer. How about you?

Write Senator Sam Nunn, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and tell him we have enough bombs to last a lifetime and we should not jeopardize the public health with the war effort any longer. Contact Tom Clements of Greenpeace at 404/876-8256 or Ellen Spears of the Savannah River Plant Working Group at 404/584-9902 for more ideas on how you can become involved. -- Glenn Carroll

GAINSAYER SUMMER 1990

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Nuclear Accident in Decatur

Two years after it began, a nuclear accident continues in a Decatur industrial park. Radiation Sterilizers, Inc. at Snapfinger Woods Business Park is still waiting for the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to remove the 79 defective cesium capsules that remain of the 252 radioactive capsules originally leased to the company by the U.S. government. Cesium is a highly radioactive byproduct of weapons-grade plutonium production.

So far U.S. taxpayers have paid at least \$30,000,000 for DOE to clean up the mess at the privately owned sterilization firm which employed 45 people in two shifts at one point.

The capsules are being taken to Hanford Plutonium Plant in Washing-

ton State where they were originally manufactured out of the cesium byproduct of plutonium production. The U.S. government then wants to ship some 18 of the faulty capsules to France.

France wants to convert the cesium to a ceramic and use it for the same medical and food supply sterilization RSI originally took it for. Although the U.S. will pay about \$1,000,000 to ship the capsules to France, France may have the cesium at no charge... as long as they agree never to send it back!

RSI's owner Alan Chin vows to reopen when the clean-up is completed, perhaps as early as January 1991. When he reopens he plans to use Canadian-manufactured radioactive cobalt.

-- Glenn Carroll

Day of Reckoning for Nuclear Waste

The '90s will likely see our society commit to a nuclear waste disposal policy. Everyone, no matter where they stand on nuclear issues, agrees that our nuclear waste problems are urgent.

The present scenario runs something like this:

U.S. agencies promote schemes with unmanageable names like Monitored Retrievable Storage (MRS), Below Regulatory Concern (BRC), Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP). These proposals range from very scary (BRC) to woefully inadequate (WIPP).

Meanwhile, environmentalists and community activists are cornered into reactionary positions of "no, no, no -- not here -- not like this!"

Not ideal conditions for sorting out one of the significant dilemmas facing humankind!

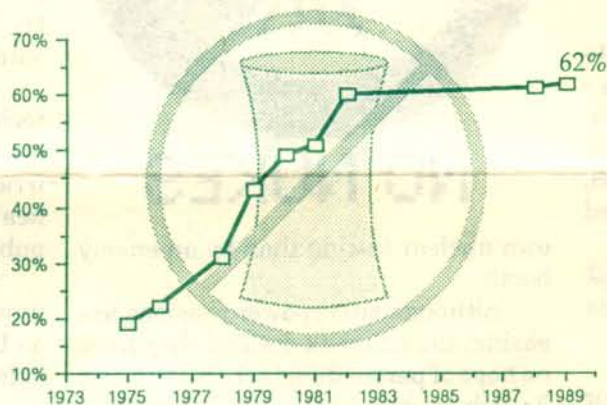
One may wonder -- in the face of space travel, genetic engineering and micro computers -- why does a method of rendering nuclear waste harmless elude us? Even more so, why do we persist in manufacturing so much nuclear waste when we have no safe way of handling it?

Jim Warner, hazardous waste engineer with Natural Resources Defense Council and formerly employed with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), expresses that a lot of money has been thrown at the problem, although he declined to evaluate the quality of the research. Uncertain whether research of the transmutation of radioactive elements into stable elements (so-called alchemy) has really been exhausted, he did say that transmutation research is now being conducted in the U.S. star wars program.

Watch for two likely conclusions to the dilemma: 1) it costs too much to make the waste truly safe so we will do as much as is "economically feasible" or 2) we will address the problem through linguistic detoxification -- declaring the problem solved. This type of public de-

Nuclear Power Opposition Continues to Rise

Over the past 14 years, public opinion against more nuclear power has risen with every new survey, reaching an all-time high of 62 percent in 1989.



Sources: Louis Harris Polls, Research/Strategy/Management

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ception has already begun.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) voted in mid-June to approve a policy of Below Regulatory Concern (BRC) deregulation of nuclear waste.

BRC is a political form of transmutation in which one-third of the nation's nuclear waste becomes "safe" simply because the NRC says it is!

We presented this frightening BRC nuclear waste policy in which nuclear materials will arrive at our local landfills, sewers and incinerators, unmarked and unregulated to many of you on Earth Day. We asked you to write your congress people to have them oppose BRC. Your cards and letters -- while not yet correcting our national course -- have had an effect.

Congress originally passed the bill giving the NRC permission to develop and institute this policy. BRC was an obscure line in a technically difficult bill and slipped past Congress unnoticed.

But as environmentalists have discovered and spread the word about what the NRC is doing, Congress has re-

sponded with an increasing concern over the policy.

Well, bless our complex government, the NRC does have the power, again, by Act of Congress, to inflict this easy-way-out-for-the-parties-responsible sham solution to their nuclear waste problems.

And, unless Congress reverses its Atomic Energy Act that gives the NRC this power, we could be stuck with a load of radioactive waste lying around just anywhere!

What's a concerned citizen to do?

Here are a couple of suggestions:

- Congress will discuss this issue on the floor of the house in late summer. Write 'em, call 'em NOW and deliver a strong message of opposition to BRC. It's already August and you're just now reading this? Contact 'em and raise the issue of nuclear waste!
- The utilities, not liable for their nuclear waste (those madcap Acts of Congress) have gotten the public message of BRC opposition. Having enough PR problems just owning and operating nuclear power plants, they aren't by-and-large, committed to taking advantage of BRC. Reinforce this position by letting Georgia Power know you oppose BRC.
- Get involved at a local or state government level and find a sponsor for legislation against BRC nuclear waste. Maine, Minnesota, Vermont and Virginia have accomplished a BRC ban and a ban is under consideration in other states.
- Over 50 local governments have passed ordinances refusing to accept BRC waste. You can express your concerns about BRC close to home. Contact your city council person or county commissioner and have them pass an ordinance against receiving BRC nuclear waste in to their jurisdictions.

-- Glenn Carroll

Georgia Tech is still trying to drum up business for its campus nuclear reactor, but lukewarm interest -- and the recently announced departure of Tech Executive Vice President Thomas Stelson, one of the reactor's strongest supporters -- could hasten permanent closure of the unit, the largest research reactor in the Southeast.

Tech administrators have vowed to close the reactor if it can't pay its way -- and officials with Tech's Neely Nuclear Research Center say it has been "greatly underutilized" since fall 1988, when it was restarted after a prolonged shutdown for safety reasons.

-- from an article by Charles Seabrook in the Atlanta Journal/Constitution



The Rocky Flats nuclear plant near Denver has a lot of serious problems to solve before it can be reopened, a panel of experts commissioned by the Department of Energy have concluded. In addition to "excessive" amounts of plutonium in ventilation ducts that must be removed, the panel said the plant is running out of room to store the toxic waste because a compacter has yet to be built. Navy officials are anxious to restart the plant, which is the sole source of plutonium triggers for thermonuclear weapons. But the panel's advice to wait on reopening should bolster congressional support for a slower approach.

-- from an article by Hazel Bradford and Tom Ichniowski in Engineering News & Report



Grassroots activists from around the world came together in May with songs, shouts and sad stories of radiation damage in Soviet Kazakhstan, and to discuss ways to halt all nuclear testing.

"We're poisoning our air; we're poisoning our soil; we're poisoning our water," former bomb-maker Ted Taylor told participants in the four-day conference. The U.S. nuclear physicist said Americans and Soviets are more likely to be killed by the pollution from their



NO NUKES

own nuclear testing than by an enemy bomb.

Although superpower tensions are easing, the activists decided they have no hope of persuading U.S., British and French leaders to stop testing nuclear bombs anytime soon. The United States detonated an underground bomb just a few days before.

-- AP Wire report, Alma Ata, U.S.S.R., 5/27/90



Oakland's 1988 "nuclear-free" initiative, one of the nation's broadest local bans on nuclear weapons-related activities, was declared unconstitutional in late April by a federal judge.

The ordinance forbids most city contracting, purchases and investments with nuclear weapons manufacturers, restricts transportation of nuclear material through the city and outlaws most nuclear weapons work in the city.

The federal government's lawsuit last September, the first it has filed against any of the more than 160 local nuclear-free laws in the country, said the Oakland ordinance interfered with exclusive federal control of national defense, atomic energy and shipments of hazardous materials.

-- AP Wire Report, San Francisco, 4/28/90



The government has approved the use of low-level radiation to rid poultry products of food-borne pathogens such

as salmonella bacteria, but poultry processors -- wary of consumer opposition to irradiated foods -- say they are in no rush to start zapping drumsticks and chicken wings.

But Michael Colby, director of Food and Water Inc., a New York-based consumer group, said, "Exposing poultry to radiation is not a solution to the salmonella problem.

"Treating toxic chickens with a toxic technology is not the way to improve the safety of poultry," he said. "Food irradiation is another threat to the health and well-being of the American public."

Colby says the process creates unique radiolytic products, also known as URPs, by breaking down the molecules of the irradiated substances.

The FDA contends the compounds are innocuous. Mr. Colby said no one knows what effect these new chemicals will have on human health.

Since it first sought government approval to begin irradiating poultry, Radiation Technology has pleaded guilty to providing false information to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and has changed its name to RTI Inc. Its former president, Martin A. Welt, served eight months in a federal prison in connection with the charges.

-- from an article by Jeff Nesmith for the Atlanta Journal/Constitution



Cold fusion equipment used by a University of Utah chemist who claimed to harness the power of the sun in a lab jar didn't produce any nuclear energy, said a physicist at the school who tested the apparatus.

"We did not see a peep," said Michael H. Salamon, who measured the nuclear output of cold fusion gear in the lab of B. Stanley Pons for five weeks.

"It's another nail in the coffin," commented Ronald Parker, director of the plasma fusion center at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "They did a very careful search for fusion effects, and they came up empty."

-- AP Wire Report, Boston, 3/29/90



ATOMIC PRIMER

PRICE-ANDERSON ACT

As industry prepared to get financially involved in atomic power, and utilities weighed the costs and benefits, one problem became obvious. Now that industry could legally build nukes and

utilities could buy and run them, what would happen in case of an accident? Who would foot the bill?

The insurance industry looked at the odds and said they wanted no part of this game. (Look at one of your insurance policies... they all contain nuclear exclusion clauses.)

The President of General Electric was one who demanded that Congress adopt legislation that would protect the nuclear industry from liability in case of an accident.

The Price-Anderson Indemnity Act, first passed in 1967 for a 10-year period, renewed in 1965, 1976 and 1987 for additional decades, guaranteed up to \$700 million in federal (taxpayer) accident coverage for nuclear accidents.

In passing the legislation, Congress took the spectre of financial responsibility in case of accident away from the utilities and nuclear hardware manufacturers. Unions criticized the act, calling it a further example of government subsidy of the nuclear industry.

In any case, consumers would be the ones to pay. The first report that attempted to give casualty statistics and set dollar figures for losses from a catastrophic accident (a meltdown) -- reported that a major accident could cost upwards of \$7 billion! And subsequent reports showed that the figure would climb as reactor size grew.

-- Source: *No Nukes; Everyone's Guide to Nuclear Power* by Anna Gyorgy & Friends 1979, South End Press, Boston, MA with updated figures

U.S. NUKES ITS OWN CITIZENS

Maybe we knew in our hearts we didn't have all the bad news about the U.S. atomic weapons program yet, but it just keeps getting more and more outrageous.

A week ago the U.S. government reported that it had exposed residents of Washington, Oregon and Idaho to more radiation than the people living downwind from Chernobyl received after the Chernobyl accident.

Angry residents of the area have long connected the Hanford Reservation Nuclear Weapons Plant to their high rate of cancer and thyroid diseases but the first serious health study of human exposure to radiation is just beginning.

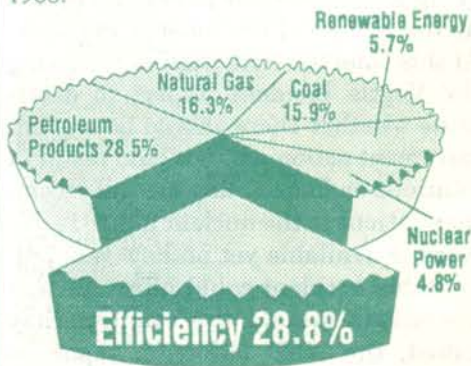
The federal report says the government knew as early as 1948 of the health consequences to residents living downwind from the Hanford Reservation. Some residents were exposed to as much as 3,000 rads in the 1940s and 1950s. A rad is compared to 12 lung rays. Workers at the atomic plant are permitted to receive five rads annually and others in the nuclear industry are not allowed to receive that high a dose.

The radioactive emissions which began soon after the first of nine reactors went critical in September 1944 are the largest ever documented at an American nuclear plant.

The report marks the first time the government has acknowledged publicly that radiation releases could have harmed humans.

Energy Efficiency

Savings through energy efficiency and energy conservation provided more than a quarter of U.S. energy services in 1988.*



* latest figures available

Sources: Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, Solar Energy Research Institute
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YES! I'd rather be active than radioactive!

I am a "Georgian Against Nuclear Energy."

I support the goals of phasing out the use of nuclear energy as soon as possible, optimizing the use of energy conservation and renewable energy, and opposing the use of nuclear weapons.

Signature _____ Date _____
 Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____ Call me about actions!

- \$10 Active!*
- \$25 Active!
- \$50 Active!
- \$ _____ Active!
- I can't afford to send money but I want to receive the newsletter.

* minimum membership donation to receive newsletter



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

VOGTLE LOSES POWER

THE SAGA OF PLANT VOGTLE CONTINUES . . .

At 9:20 AM on March 20, 1990, a gasoline truck backed into a transformer pole in the switchyard of Plant Vogtle, resulting in a loss of off-site power to Unit 1. The only active diesel backup generator failed to start. A Site Area Emergency was declared at 10:00 AM. The emergency was the result of a failure to start the necessary power supply to keep the pumps providing cooling water to the partially exposed core.

During the 30-minute power loss to Unit 1, the cooling water temperature increased by 18 degrees. The event was downgraded to Alert State at 10:30 AM, after a backup diesel generator was manually started to restore power to essential plant systems.

A Site Area Emergency is the second most serious level of nuclear emer-

gency classification.

The NRC sent a team to the site at the time of the accident. In addition, six NRC inspectors were sent to Plant Vogtle on March 22 to conduct an independent evaluation.

On March 25, the NRC upgraded its investigation of the March 20 accident to what NRC spokesperson Ken Clark calls a "high level inquiry into basic operational procedures that could affect plants nationwide.

The Vogtle Investigation Team released its findings to the Commission in a Washington, D.C. briefing on June 8, 1990. Its first summary conclusion is perhaps the most important and of most concern to the public.

The report states: "Adequate precursor information was available to make this incident preventable. A combination of non-conservative initial conditions, combined with the failure to adequately control switchyard work activities, led to the Vogtle incident." The report further states "the Vogtle staff had no effective control over a fuel and lubricants truck conducting routine operations in the switchyard."

"Moreover, because the truck carried fuel, there was the risk of a conflagration from ignition of fuel caused by electrical arcing. The damage to the switchyard equipment from such an event would have further limited the Vogtle Staff's ability to recover electrical power. Guidance identifying the need for additional controls and precautions for work on electrical equipment, in-

cluding work in the switchyard, had been provided to the industry."

The technical failure of the back-up generator experienced during this accident raises real questions about Georgia Power's and the nuclear industry's ability, to identify safety problems and fix them in a timely fashion.

Additionally, there is some difficulty controlling emergency activities. Communications problems also exist in notifying off-site authorities of the declaration of a Site Area Emergency.

It now appears that we in Southeast can chalk one up to human error, lack of follow-through and good luck. The most serious accident in the nuclear industry since TMI could have easily been prevented and could have just as easily been catastrophic.

It does not take a rocket scientist to understand the charade and the danger being imposed on the American people by the NRC and the nuclear industry. At this time the NRC staff is reviewing the Vogtle Incident Report to determine whether there should be any enforcement action which would result in citations or fines or any overall recommendations to the nuclear industry. No word is available yet on how this preventable accident could affect nuclear operations around the country. Stay tuned, the NRC follow-up report is expected in late July or early August.

-- excerpted from an article in *Plugging In*, Summer 1990 by Deborah Sheppard, executive director of Campaign for a Prosperous Georgia

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