

# Sacred Earth and Space Plowshares II Among "Nuclear Free Future Award" Winners

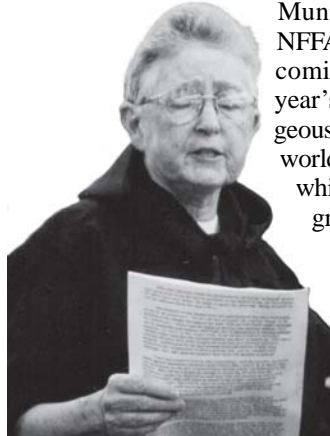
Since 1998, the Nuclear-Free Future Award (NFFA) has annually honored individuals, groups and communities working tirelessly to end the atomic age. This year the award jury chose the following individuals as recipients:

**\*Resistance: Carol Gilbert, Jackie Hudson and Ardeth Platte, USA**

**\*Education: Dr. Souad Najj Al-Azzawi, Iraq**

**\*Solutions: Corbin Harney, Newe Sogobia**

**\*Lifetime Achievement: Inge Schmitz-Feuerhake, Germany**



Jackie Hudson

The award's directors, based in Munich, Germany, explained the NFFA this way: "For the sake of the coming generations, each of this year's Award recipients has courageously spoken out and labored for a world more caring, more sane, one in which the uranium remains in the ground. ...

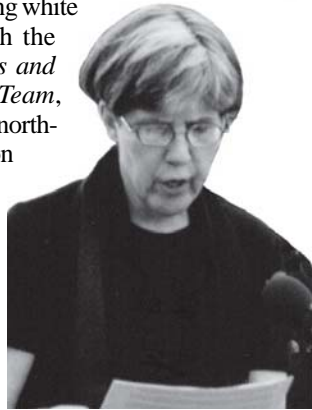
"Fifty years of nuclear madness has set into motion a terrible engine of perpetual destruction. All over the world, criticality events are gathering at the bottom of sealed cans, drums, tanks and bottles. No contaminated groundwater system can be restored. No cloud sewn with cancer can be called back. No clean-up technology can eliminate radionuclides or heavy metals from the Earth. Winning the Cold War far outweighed worrying about the safe disposal of radioactive wastes. The Cold War's cold revenge: for the next few hundreds of centuries, sites housing highly toxic radioactive wastes will demand careful monitoring and maintenance. We've passed along to the coming generations a mortgage claiming billions."

At present, each of the four awards is outfitted with the sum of \$10,000. The presenters at NFFA wrote about their choice of Ardeth, Carol and Jackie:

"... George W. Bush, a born-again Christian, felt that the Almighty was on his side at the beginning of 2002 when he demanded the destruction of all weapons of mass destruction. But then things got complicated. On October 6, 2002, ... three Dominican nuns, Carol Gilbert, Jackie Hudson and Ardeth Platte, wearing white mop-up suits emblazoned with the words *Disarmament Specialists and Citizens Weapons Inspection Team*, broke into the N-8 missile silo in northern Colorado to paint a cross on the structure using their own blood and to hammer at the silo ... [in the spirit of turning swords to plowshares]. When Air Force personnel arrived in Humvees to arrest the nuns at gunpoint, Sr. Gilbert tried to un-complicate matters by explaining that they were simply following the call of George Bush to destroy all weapons of mass-destruction. ...

"The sisters believe nuclear weapons are the 'taproot' of social and economic injustice because the billions of dollars spent on them could go to programs for the poor and needy. In their action statement they wrote, 'We, women religious, come to Colorado to unmask the false religion and worship of national security so evident at Buckley Air Force Base in Aurora, the missile silos, Schriever AFB, the Space Warfare Center, the Air Force Space Command Center at Peterson AFB, Cheyenne Mountain, and the Air Force Academy. We reject the mission of these along with StratCom in Omaha, Nebraska. ...'

"During the nuns' trial, which ... ended April 7, U.S. District Judge Robert Blackburn barred the jury from hearing [expert



Carol Gilbert

testimony on] international law. ... and prohibited the sisters from speaking about the moral and legal justification for their actions. The nuns were found guilty and ... on July 24, Blackburn sentenced Platte to 41 months in prison, Gilbert to 33 months, and Hudson to 30 months. ... Blackburn labeled the Dominican Sisters, 'dangerously irresponsible.'

"Meanwhile, the Bush Administration has embarked on a quest for a new generation of nuclear bombs that are smaller and less powerful — nuclear bombs that the Pentagon might actually use in battle. ... George W. Bush is quite assuredly tilting the world towards a new nuclear arms race. Who is dangerously irresponsible? ..."

**Write the winning resisters:**

**Sister Ardeth Platte, OP**  
# 10857-039  
FCI Danbury  
Route 37 Danbury, CT 06811

**Sister Carol Gilbert, OP**  
# 10856-039  
R1  
FPC Alderson  
PO Box A  
Alderson, WV 24910

**Sister Jacqueline Hudson, OP**  
# 08808-039  
FPC Victorville  
PO Box 5100  
Adelanto, CA 92301

**For complete information on the winners, see: <[www.nuclear-free.com/english/frames7.htm](http://www.nuclear-free.com/english/frames7.htm)>**



Ardeth Platte

## Legal Quagmire for Radioactive Waste

By Bonnie Urfer

Across the country, dozens of lawsuits against the Department of Energy (DOE), the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the EPA have slowed the radioactive waste shuffle. Organizations, states and utilities have filed suits against the DOE, hoping to move radioactive waste to someone else's back yard. Anybody's! But there is no place to put it.

This year, DOE officials planned on reclassifying — that is re-defining — high-level radioactive waste so some could be left where it is in leaky tanks. However in July, U.S. District Judge B. Lynn Winmill ruled in Idaho that the proposed DOE regulation violated the federal Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982. Judge Winmill's 15-page ruling requires that the DOE remove nearly 88 million gallons of high-level waste from three DOE nuclear weapons sites, including sludge from the bottom of hundreds of million-gallon waste storage tanks.

The DOE plans to keep trying to redefine radioactive waste in order to reduce the volume and expense of its inventory. Three federal "tank farms" responsible for some of this high-level radioactive quagmire are the Idaho National Engineering and "Environmental" Laboratory (INEEL), the Savannah River Site in South Carolina and Hanford Reservation in southeast Washington.

In Idaho, the DOE wanted to leave about 1,000 gallons of sludge per tank, what the agency calls "residual material," (a blend of strontium, cesium, plutonium, etc.), mix it with grout and concrete, and leave it in the tanks, or gain authorization to ship it to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico. The sludge at the bottom of the tanks must currently be processed for permanent disposal at a federal repository for high-level radioactive waste. Yucca Mountain in Nevada could be the final burial ground, but Yucca is embroiled in six lawsuits of its own and may never open.

Idaho has been battling the DOE over radioactive waste for decades. The Snake River Alliance, the Natural Resources Defense Council and other environmental organizations — supported by the states of Idaho, Washington, South Carolina, Oregon, and the Shoshone-Bannock and Yakima Nations — have successfully forced the government to provide deep burial of high-level waste.

The Idaho decision could mean decades of delay in removing the radioactive stew from waste tanks. "Cleanup" costs for the three tank farms is expected to increase 10-to-100 times the current estimate of \$39 billion.

All three facilities played a role in producing plutonium for H-bombs, extracting it from irradiated fuel rods from commercial reactors. High-level liquid wastes and sludge from this "reprocessing" is a particularly dangerous and deadly fraction of the radioactive garbage heap.

Nevada has multiple lawsuits pending against the DOE, the NRC and EPA over the Yucca Mt. plan. The state has also sued the DOE over water rights and refuses to grant water

permits needed to operate the future dump. Additionally, Nevada is challenging the DOE's methods, claiming that instead of the congressionally mandated natural geologic protection from radiation, the DOE is relying on cask designs to assure waste containment. Adding to the dilemma is the fact that the Yucca site is not big enough to hold all the waste now waiting for processing and shipment.

The WIPP site now contains "low-level" transuranics, a combination of plutonium-contaminated garbage and toxic waste, and is not licensed to take high-level waste. It's also not large enough to store all of the military's low-level waste.

The Savannah River site has about 34 million gallons of highly radioactive waste in 49 tanks. The DOE has been "vitrifying" the liquid, forming it into glass-like logs. By 2000, about one-sixth of the total volume had been processed, with all vitrification expected to take at least 25 years.

New York State wants the DOE to clean up and remove everything from a site in West Valley, including contaminated buildings and equipment. The DOE wants to ship only its vitrified waste from the West Valley Demonstration Project and nothing else. "This is DOE's attempt to pawn off highly contaminated stuff on the state," said Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY). "We're fighting it."

### Utilities sue to force its waste off-site

In an old radioactive waste snag, the federal government has failed to meet an agreement with nuclear utilities to take possession of their waste irradiated fuel rods (called "spent fuel" by public relations officers). The agreement stems from the 1950s, when the Pentagon wanted to extract plutonium from the waste for use in H-bombs. Taxpayers carry the increasing cost of packaging and "burying" the deadly radiation produced by the private utilities. Twelve utilities have filed lawsuits claiming more than \$5 billion in damages. The problem of irradiated waste fuel rods is dire enough that Russell Mellor, president of Connecticut Yankee Atomic Power Co., said, "Regardless of where DOE provides for storage, it has the clear authority and ability to begin removing spent fuel from reactor sites." Mellor doesn't care where the rods are taken, just so they are moved. Eighty of the nation's 103 operating reactors are expected to run out of on-site storage space for irradiated fuel rods by 2010. If Yucca Mountain doesn't open, the cost of that breach of contract is estimated to be \$61 billion.

Xcel Energy's Prairie Island nuclear power facility in Minnesota will be forced to shut down in 2007 if waste fuel is not removed from the site.

The DOE made an deal with the Pennsylvania Electric Power Company (PECO) that excused its payment to the Nuclear Waste Fund, and even agreed to pay the utility up to \$80 million extra for the DOE's inability to meet waste removal contract obligations. In response, 18 other utilities have filed

a lawsuit against the DOE, complaining that no utility should be exempt from payments into the Nuclear Waste Fund.

Owners of reactors slated for decommissioning and dismantling face cost increases because irradiated fuel rods are stored on site, preventing further moves.

### States rights and dump site authority

State governments are fighting to retain authority over the building and licensing of radioactive waste dumps within their borders. The DOE intends to run roughshod over state opposition to its dumping plans. Utah filed a suit against the feds in an attempt to prohibit Xcel and others from storing waste reactor fuel on the Skull Valley Goshute Reservation. The state lost the case with the judge stating that only the federal government has jurisdiction over nuclear safety. Texas is also fighting to keep control of its licensing process.

Nebraska lost a court battle with U.S. Ecology, Inc. and the Central Compact Commission, comprised of Kansas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Nebraska. After the Compact Commission chose Nebraska, the state refused to license the low-level radioactive waste dump. The Compact filed suit against Nebraska for the return of \$151 million it spent to develop a waste storage facility. The state has spent more than \$9,000 a day to keep the radioactive waste out and it pulled out of the Compact in June 2003. Nebraska has appealed the court decision.

U.S. Ecology sued California for not pursuing the opening of the Ward Valley low-level waste dump. U.S. Ecology intends to collect \$162 million in costs, interest, lost profits and legal expenses.

Numerous utility companies use dry cask on-site storage while others are compacting their irradiated fuel rods in tighter and tighter grids inside waste fuel cooling ponds — all in an effort to keep the hugely profitable, heavily subsidized reactors running. Over 40,000 tons of irradiated fuel rods are stored at commercial reactors in 31 states. That amount increases by 2,000 tons annually. Long-term storage and monitoring of all types of radioactive waste — no matter the classification — continues to be the Achilles heel of the industry. No state wants the trash that will remain deadly for hundreds of thousands of years.

Unless a state steps forward to volunteer as a permanent sacrifice zone for weapons and utility profiteers, the nuclear industry could be shut down. U.S. taxpayers are shouldering the billions and billions of dollars spent to defend the DOE and NRC against bad policy. With government and corporate interest renewed in reactor construction, nuclear power proponents remain uneducated and ignorant of the problems associated with production and long-term isolation of irradiated fuel rods. For the moment, lawsuits are slowing the deadly commercial nuclear power industry. The query lingers: will the courts rule in favor of safety, sanity and an end to the nuclear age?