

# NUCLEAR SHORTS

## Nuclear Workers' Comp

WASHINGTON — In October, Congress voted to move control of the Department of Energy's (DOE) nuclear worker compensation program to the Labor Department. The DOE squandered nearly \$100 million on the program in the past four years while handing out benefits to only 100 of the 25,000 claimants who filed.

The hand over of the program will likely speed the process by which thousands of survivors of poisoned nuclear weapons workers should receive lump-sum payments of \$125,000. Workers who are still living will have to wait to receive checks until compensation details are worked out. However, all DOE cases will be reviewed by the Labor Department, including those deemed ineligible. Congress also decided that the federal government, not contractors who ran the nuclear weapons sites, must pay the bills.

In other nuclear compensation news, the Bikini Islanders who were forced into exile by U.S. nuclear tests are benefiting from international scuba diving expeditions that are exploring the fleet of World War II vessels lying on the seabed. The Bikini Atoll dive program raised approximately \$200,000 this past year. Half of the money is paid directly to 3,470 people from Bikini. The other half is used to provide supplemental food for displaced islanders living nearby. The 1946 bomb tests sent more than a dozen warships and submarines to the bottom of the 170-foot lagoon, including the aircraft carrier the *USS Saratoga*. — *Agence France-Presse*, Dec. 5, 2004; AP, Jan. 11, 2005

## U.S. Nuclear Sub Runs Aground, Again

WASHINGTON — One crew member was killed and 24 injured when the nuclear powered fast attack submarine *USS San Francisco* ran aground Jan. 8, 350 miles south of Guam. The sub was traveling at high speed, 35 mph, en route to Australia, when its nose cone containing the sonar dome smashed into a rock formation.

The sub's commander, Kevin Mooney, was reassigned to shore duty pending an investigation of the crash. The Navy maintains that there was no damage to the sub's nuclear reactor or weapon system. The *San Francisco* is a *Los Angeles* class sub that carries dozens of Tomahawk cruise missiles. There were 137 crew members aboard.

The nuclear navy has a history of running aground. In Nov. 2003, the *USS Hartford* hit the seafloor in the Mediterranean. In August 2001, the *USS Greenville*, which had previously hit and sank a Japanese fishing boat killing nine people, ran aground off the coast of Saipan, in the Mariana Islands of Micronesia.

—United Press International, Jan. 12, 2005

## Rocky Flats "Cleanup"

ROCKY FLATS, Colorado — In December, one of the most radioactive sites in the country was demolished. Building 707, one of 800 structures at the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons complex, 15 miles from Denver, assembled the triggers for more than 70,000 nuclear warheads beginning in 1952. The building contained an assembly line of 377 gloveboxes, the stainless steel enclosures with heavy lead-lined gloves inside that were meant to protect workers from the deadly radioactive materials they handled. Sometimes workers were exposed to radiation when sharp metal objects inside the glovebox punctured the gloves. Occasionally the plutonium shavings spontaneously ignited inside the box.

Federal officials now admit that radiation exposure from Rocky Flats is resulting in more cancer among workers than previously thought. The *Rocky Mountain News* reported on Feb. 28, that 29 percent of the cancers reported by former workers were caused by workplace radiation. Previously it was estimated that 1 to 10 percent of cancer cases were caused by radiation. Former Rocky Flats workers believe the new figures are still too low.

Gloveboxes are not a tool of the past. The Flanders Corp., in Aiken County, Georgia, is currently hiring as many as 800 people to make gloveboxes for the nuclear industry. The company will reach full employment if the federal government builds a mixed-oxide fuel facility at the Savannah River Site in Georgia.

— *Denver Post*, Dec. 9, & AP, Dec. 8, 2004; United Press International, Feb. 28, 2005

## China Launches New Class of Nuclear Submarines

WASHINGTON, DC — China has launched the first submarine in a new class of nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed subs designed to fire intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

Called "Type 094," it will be China's first submarine capable of launching nuclear weapons that could reach the U.S. from the country's home waters, according to a Pentagon official who spoke under condition of anonymity.

China has also been developing a new class of submarine-launched ballistic missile, called the JL-2, which is expected to have a range in excess of 4,600 miles. The Type 094 subs would carry these new missiles, but it is not clear whether any are ready for deployment. China has had only one submarine capable of launching nuclear missiles, called Type 092, and in 2001 the Pentagon announced that it was not operational. Its missiles could fly up to 600 miles.

China is also modernizing its land-based nuclear missile force, replacing its estimated 20 ICBMs with more modern versions. In a report on its military issued last May, the Pentagon said China's cache of ICBMs could increase to 30 by next year and to 60 by 2010. The U.S., France, Russia, Britain, and possibly Israel and Pakistan have submarines capable of firing ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads.

— *The Guardian & The Pakistan Times*, Dec. 3, 2004

## Truckloads of Nuclear Trash

OAK RIDGE, Tenn. — An accelerated cleanup of the K-25 uranium enrichment complex here could mean 125 daily truckloads of radioactive scrap going into the government's on-site nuclear landfill. The pace could continue over three years. John Owsley, the state's environmental oversight director in Oak Ridge, says the traffic volume would be about one truck every five minutes.

The landfill was opened a couple of years ago to take a broad range of radioactively contaminated rubbish from the Energy Department's cleanup operations at Oak Ridge. A special road is being constructed so that trucks can go directly from K-25 to the landfill several miles away without clogging public highways. The nuclear trash ranges from old cars to motor wiring. Some of it has been at the sprawling weapons site since the 1950s, but most came in the 1960s and '70s when the uranium-enrichment facilities were upgraded.

— Associated Press, Dec. 28, 2004

## Super Rich to Avoid Radiation on Vacation

CHICAGO — Two private companies have teamed up to build the first luxury recreational vehicle (RV) that it says will fend off nuclear radiation. Parliament Coach Corp., based in Clearwater, Florida, has partnered with Homeland Defense Vehicles to offer consumers a luxury motor coach that can protect occupants against ionizing radiation from dirty bombs as well as biological and chemical attacks. "Many people enjoy the RV life style, but we also live in an era when people have some level of fear about terrorism," explains Parliament executive Harvey Mitchell. Occupants could live for several days in the custom-built motor coach. The RVs will cost from \$1.2 to \$2 million. For an additional \$100,000, there is the option of a "positive air pressure" filtration system to ensure that the air you are breathing is radiation-free. The RV was introduced Jan. 26 at the Super RV show in Tampa.

— Reuters, Jan. 21, 2005

## The Effectiveness of Nonviolent Direct Action

WASHINGTON — A study of the green movement between 1960 and 1994 concludes that nonviolent direct action is more likely to influence environmental policy than schmoozing on Capitol Hill. The study compares the number of bills passed by Congress with tactics employed by green groups in the same year. Jon Agnone, a sociologist at the University of Washington, Seattle, found that sit-ins, rallies and boycotts were highly effective at seeing new environmental laws passed. Each protest raised the number of pro-environment bills enacted by 2.2 per cent.

"If you make a big enough disturbance than people have to recognize what you are doing," Agnone concluded. John Passacantando, executive director of Greenpeace USA, agrees, "We know that unless a politician feels real pressure, or a chief executive senses a threat to his market, everything else is just talk." — *New Scientist*, August 28, 2004

## Vieques Added to Superfund List

NEW YORK — The Environmental Protection Agency has announced that the military bombing range on the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico, will be added to the Superfund list of the nation's most hazardous waste sites. One hundred years of U.S. navy operations and bombing sprees on the eastern end of the island left land and water contaminated with mercury, lead, copper, magnesium, lithium, perchlorate, TNT, napalm, depleted uranium, PCBs, solvents and pesticides. The navy ceased operations on Vieques May 1, 2003, after more than a year of civilian protests involving hundreds of arrests.

The superfund listing does not include the island of Culebra, which was used by the U.S. for military exercises between 1902 and 1975. The cleanup of Culebra depends on an agreement between the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the Army Corps of Engineers, which is currently responsible for former military sites on the island.

— Environment News Service, ens-newswire.com, Feb. 9, 2005

## INEL to Make Plutonium Batteries for Space

IDAHO — The Department of Energy announced in November that the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory would begin production of plutonium-238 for use in batteries to power deep-space probes. NASA intends to rely increasingly on plutonium-based Radioisotope Power Systems (RPS) to power instruments aboard its deep space probes for decades.

The batteries that use Pu-238 are assembled in Idaho, at Argonne National Laboratory, West. But production and isolation of the plutonium is currently done at national laboratories in South Carolina, Tennessee, and New Mexico, and the highly radioactive isotope is then shipped to Idaho.

The DOE is concerned about cost and security problems of moving plutonium 8,000 miles. The DOE wants to consolidate all nuclear RPS production at a single DOE site.

Plutonium-238 is a different from weapons-grade plutonium-239, but the difference of one electron notwithstanding, plutonium is perhaps the most dangerous, toxic, and carcinogenic substance on earth.

In a town meeting in Idaho Falls in early December, opinions regarding the plan varied. "Aren't you giving Idaho the dirty part of it?" asked Paul Bacca, a former nuclear worker at Argonne, West. But Nick Nichols, an amateur astronomer and former INEL communications manager was less worried. "When I heard the DOE wanted to move the plutonium-238 program to Idaho, I said 'Whoopee!' because I knew exactly what those [plutonium batteries] did."

The Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space has excellent materials to help stop this rush to nuclearize space exploration. See resources.

— Pocatello, *Idaho State Journal*, Dec. 3, 2004; Casper, *Wyoming Tribune*, Dec. 9, 2004

## Anti-nuclear Groups Bid for Management of Los Alamos Weapons Lab

NEW MEXICO — Two anti-nuclear organizations have announced their intention to make a bid for management of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. If chosen, Tri-Valley Communities Against a Radioactive Environment and Nuclear Watch of New Mexico (the *other* Nukewatch), will redirect the nuclear weapons research facility from weapons to the study of climate change, alternative energy sources and environmental clean-up of the surrounding land. The DOE has opened the contract to competition after 60-years of management by the University of California. Security lapses by UC led the DOE to search for new managers. — *Nature*, Feb. 27, 2005

## Cockles Contaminated by Sellafield's Plutonium

BRITAIN — Morecambe Bay cockles harvested off the coast of Sellafield are contaminated by plutonium released from this nuclear waste reprocessing site. UN scientists are set to issue new contamination limits this year and the European Union has said it may adopt the scientists' guidelines. If the new standards are imposed, importation of the cockles into Europe will be banned. — *Northwest Evening Mail*, Jan. 24, 2005

## Halliburton's Radioactive Shipment Lost in Mail

WASHINGTON, DC — Halliburton Co., the infamous oil services company and military contractor in Iraq and elsewhere, lost track of a shipment of radioactive material in October but didn't alert the government until the second week of February. The material, two sources of the isotope americium, used in oil well exploration, was being shipped from Russia to Houston. The NRC was notified of the missing americium on Feb. 8. After an intense search it was found at a freight facility in Boston Feb. 9. (See report on stolen radioactive gauges p. 3.)

Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., said the incident and Halliburton's malfeasance highlights inadequate security rules involving nuclear materials. The shipment was classified as having potential to cause permanent injury if handled improperly. Depending on the material, government regulations require notification either immediately or within 30 days. Wendy Hall, spokeswoman for Halliburton, blamed the company's shipper, whom she says never alerted the company that the material was missing. — Associated Press, Feb. 11, 2005

## RESOURCES

- \* **AlliantACTION!**, (651) 388-4814; email: alliantaction@circlevision.org; web: circlevision.org
- \* **Arms Trade Resource Center**, 66 Fifth Ave., 9th Fl., New York, NY 10011; (212) 229-5808; web: worldpolicy.org; email: hartung@newschool.edu
- \* **For Mother Earth**, Maria Hendrikaplein 5, 9000 Gent, Belgium; email: international@motherearth.org; web: www.motherearth.org
- \* **Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space**, P.O. Box 652, Brunswick, ME 04011; (207) 279-0517; web: space4peace.org; email: globalnet@mindspring.com
- \* **Greenpeace**, 702 H Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20001; (202) 462-1177; web: greenpeaceusa.org
- \* **Institute for Energy and Environmental Research**, 6935 Laurel Ave., Suite 201, Takoma Park, Maryland 20912; (301) 270-5500; web: ieer.org; email: ieer@ieer.org
- \* **Low Level Radiation Campaign**, The Knoll, Montpellier Park, Llandrindod Wells, Powys, LD1 5LW, Britain, newsletter: *Radioactive Times*, email: bramhall@llrc.org; web: llrc.org/du/duframes.htm
- \* **Los Alamos Study Group**, 2901 Summit Place NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106; (505) 265-1200; email: gmello@lasg.org; web: www.lasg.org
- \* **Nuclear Information and Resource Service**, 1424 16th Street NW, #404, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 328-0002; web: nirs.org; email: nirsnet@nirs.org
- \* **Tri-Valley CAREs**, 2582 Old First St., Livermore, CA 94551; (925) 443-7148; web: trivalleycares.org
- \* **War Resisters League**, 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012; (212) 228-0450, email: wrl@warresisters.org; web: warresisters.org