

NUCLEAR SHORTS

Fire Burns Former Nuclear Research Facility

LOS ANGELES — A wildfire in California scorched two-thirds of the 2,800-acre Santa Susana Field Lab, a former nuclear research facility. Local residents and environmental groups were concerned that the fire released contaminants to the air, but Boeing, owner of the Lab, has said they “don’t believe” that occurred. The test lab was used by Rocketdyne, the Pentagon, NASA and the Energy Department to conduct rocket, missile and nuclear testing for nearly 40 years.

The South Coast Air Quality Management District took several air samples from nearby several hours after the fire. It reported that the levels of toxins present no reason for concern. Daniel Hirsch, head of the environmental watchdog group Committee to Bridge the Gap, and Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) demanded to know what levels of perchlorate, beryllium, dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), among other chemicals, were detected in the air during and after the fire. Ten buildings were destroyed, while others used for storing hazardous and radioactive material were not damaged.

— *LA Daily News*, Oct. 21 & *Simi Valley Acorn*, Nov. 4, 2005

Missing U-235 Illegally Landfilled

TEANECK, New Jersey — A Ledoux & Company laboratory somehow “lost” a vial of uranium-235 sometime between March 30 and April 1. The lab could receive a whopping \$3,250 fine from the NRC for the potentially deadly accident. The mishap resulted from several license violations including: failure to adequately survey a package and remove the U-235; failure to retain the package in spite of the missing uranium; failure to keep the material in a restricted area; and unlawful disposal of the uranium in an ordinary landfill.

In an April 12 search, lab staff determined that the container of U-235 had been disposed of in any of several area landfills. No effort to retrieve the radioactive substance is planned. The NRC concurred with the company that a search was “impractical” given the number of possible dumps to be checked. The NRC claims that the U-235 emits less than one-tenth of a millirem per hour and posed “no threat to members of the public.” — NRC News Release, Nov. 2, 2005

Jobs, Schools, Hospitals or Trident

LONDON, England — The British nuclear arsenal was last modernized in 1980 and opinion is divided about Prime Minister Tony Blair’s decision to upgrade the Trident fleet — at a cost of 32.4 billion dollars — instead of using equivalent funds to build 800 schools, 60 hospitals or employing 20,000 people. The current arsenal includes four submarines each carrying up to 48 nuclear warheads on Trident II missiles. It takes up to 14 years to develop new vessels, so Blair’s decision is due soon. The Trident fleet will be retired between 2020 and 2025. Government ministers have ignored demands to give Parliament the chance to vote on the issue. Paul Flynn, the Newport West MP, said, “The Cold War has ended and it’s possible to discuss these things openly. There’s no reason why we should not have a debate and a vote in the Commons on it. Having a new Trident would make the world a more dangerous place. We campaign against nuclear proliferation among other nations and we should lead by example.” Flynn said possession of a nuclear arsenal was irrelevant to Britain’s main tasks of peacekeeping and humanitarian relief. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has launched a nationwide petition against Trident’s replacement.

— *Manchester Independent*, Oct. 31, 2005

Oil Drilling At Bomb Test Site

BATTELEMENT MESA, Colorado — Presco, a natural gas drilling company, has asked the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission to lift a moratorium on drilling in a 40-acre area previously used as a nuclear weapon blast site. The company plans to explore the ground for radioactivity a half-mile from the bombed area south of Battlement Mesa.

In 1969, the federal government conducted Project Rulison, an experiment to free natural gas using a 43-kiloton nuclear bomb blast 8,426 feet underground. The explosion released 3.4 times the destructive power of the Hiroshima bomb and registered 5.5 on the Richter scale. The bombing was considered a failure because the exposed natural gas was too radioactive to use. Fearing possible radioactive contamination, all drilling below 6,000 feet is illegal.

— *The Daily Sentinel*, Aug. 31, 2005; Essay by Chester McQueary, Dec. 12, 1994

Dounreay Building Closed after Spill

DOUNREAY, Scotland — A “cementation” factory at Dounreay, in the far north of Scotland, was closed when a remotely operated system failed and caused the dumping onto a slab floor of more than 70 gallons of radioactive material mixed with 660 pounds of cement. The liquid in the mix comes from the reprocessing of highly radioactive waste reactor fuel (which has for decades been kept in underground tanks). It is pumped and combined with the cement. The batches are then solidified in 132-gallon drums. A robot missed one of the barrels and the deadly radioactive waste solidified on

the floor. The Dounreay complex has been in decommissioning for 30 years. A Dounreay spokesman said, “All the radiation is contained within the cell and there was no danger to any individual as the walls are about four-feet thick and work is done robotically. It is undoubtedly a setback to the decommissioning of the site because one of the highest priorities is to convert liquid waste into solid waste.”

— Press Association, Ltd., BBC, Sept. 26, 2005

Radioactive Scrap Metal Sent to Japan

HYOGO, Japan — A smelter in Japan imported from the U.S. 16 tons of scrap metal that included 88 pounds of depleted uranium. The metal was slated to become aluminum alloy. Japan’s Education, Science and Technology Ministry refused to isolate the DU until the factory owner paid the equivalent of about \$2,000 for a license to handle the radioactive waste. Japanese law fails to accommodate instances in which operators, such as the Hyogo Prefecture factory, unintentionally come into possession of radioactive elements. The factory owner is refusing to pay the license fee. The DU remains improperly stored. The agency said in 2000 that it was considering a range of measures in response to incidents such as DU arriving from the U.S. One such measure would include a nationwide search for nuclear materials held at unlicensed facilities and the creation of a protocol to accept unwanted radioactive material. None of these measures have been implemented. The ministry now says it has yet to decide where to store unneeded nuclear materials because such a plan would inevitably be opposed by neighboring residents.

— *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, Nov. 10, 2005

Jury Rejects Claim Against Hanford Polluters

RICHLAND, Washington — A federal jury rejected an Idaho woman’s assertion that emissions from the Hanford nuclear weapons complex had caused her thyroid cancer. The case was one of the first to go to trial out of thousands of claims against the contractors that once operated Hanford. The complex produced plutonium for nuclear weapons, starting with the Manhattan Project which built the first atomic bombs. A lawyer for Shannon Rhodes, 64, of Coeur d’Alene, said Ms. Rhodes was devastated by the verdict. Six months ago another jury deadlocked in her case, one of six regarded as representative of more than 2,000 people who claim that releases from Hanford have damaged their health.

— *New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2005

Funding for Bunker Buster Cut

WASHINGTON, DC — For the second year in a row, a bipartisan coalition in Congress has denied funding for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP). On Oct. 25, Senate Energy appropriations committee members decided to rescind the House decision and eliminate funds for the RNEP, effectively killing the program. The Bush administration had requested \$4 million to fund research to determine whether a missile casing on a one megaton nuclear warhead could survive a thrust into the earth and take out a hardened and deeply buried military target. The funding was requested despite an April report by the National Academy of Sciences declaring that it would be impossible to develop a nuclear bunker buster that could burrow deep enough into the earth to contain the massive amounts of radioactive fallout.

— *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct. 28, & Arms Control Association Analysis, Oct. 26, 2005

Atomic Bomb National Park

WASHINGTON, DC — The Manhattan Project atomic bomb production sites might soon be turned into national parks in order to preserve the sites and their history. The National Park Service is about to launch a two-year study of bomb sites to determine which should be included in the park system. Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-New Mexico), who sponsored the bill, has said making the sites part of the park system would elevate their importance and help promote tourism and public understanding of the historical significance of the Manhattan Project. The legislation singles out sites such as Oak Ridge, Tennessee, Los Alamos, New Mexico, and Hanford, Washington.

— Associated Press, Oct. 23, 2005

Low-Level Waste Dumps Growing

CLIVE, Utah — The low-level radioactive waste dump Envirocare, 80 miles west of Salt Lake City, Utah, is booming with business. The dump, which opened as the nation’s only privately owned and operated radioactive and hazardous waste landfill in 1988, recently won approval to double in size. The company said the new land is needed for an administrative building and waste handling equipment. Meanwhile, long lines of rail cars are backed up in every direction, waiting to be unloaded, cleaned and returned to

the owners. Envirocare now holds enough waste to give every Utah resident 61.5 cubic feet of the stuff.

In Colorado, ranchers are fighting a local hazardous waste landfill and state officials over whether to accept low-level radioactive material at the dump. In the town of Last Chance, ranchers and local commissioners have asked the state to leave the town alone. The waste dump wants to accept uranium mill tailings from Denver and sludge from ponds outside municipal water treatment facilities.

— *Salt Lake Tribune*, Oct. 1 & *Rocky Mountain News*, Sept. 2, 2005

225,000 H-Bombs

WASHINGTON, DC — The Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) estimates that as of 2003, 35 countries collectively possess 1,830 tons of plutonium — enough to make 225,000 hydrogen bombs. The plutonium stockpile continues to increase worldwide by 70 tons per year. The existence of 140 tons of neptunium-237 and americium in 32 countries, presents a growing danger as they can be used to create a “dirty” nuclear device.

— *New Scientist*, Sept. 7, 2005

Pacifists Toss U.S. Sub Base from Sardinia

ROME — The island of Sardinia, south of continental Italy, received with satisfaction the announcement of the closing of the U.S. La Magdalena military base located there. The base will be transferred to another country.

Italian Defense Minister Antonio Martino announced the closure, and Governor Renato Soru said the

decision would benefit the island’s population.

The 30-year-old base, housing 3,000 U.S. soldiers and their relatives, was turned into a port for U.S. nuclear submarines. For years the removal of the U.S. soldiers has been demanded by pacifist and ecology organizations that denounced the appearance of radioactive pollution in the island’s waters. — *Prensa Latina*, Havana, Nov. 24, 2005

World Sales of Radioactive Materials Increases

NEW YORK — The United Nations reports a substantial increase in trafficking in radioactive materials during 2003, including one case involving weapons-grade material. The International Atomic Energy Agency’s Illicit Trafficking Database records 121 such events. In June, 2003, an individual attempted to transport 170 grams of highly enriched uranium (HEU) across the Georgian border.

There have been 18 confirmed cases of trafficking in HEU since 1993 with 220 total incidents and about 50 cases of dangerous source transfers. In a few situations, kilogram quantities of weapons-grade nuclear material were involved. Low-dose materials for sale have included reactor fuel pellets, natural uranium, DU and thorium. In some cases, smaller amounts were thought to be samples of larger quantities available for sale or at risk of being stolen. The majority of confirmed nuclear incidents during 1993–2004 involved criminal activity motivated by profit. During the same time frame, there were 424 legitimate sales of radioactive materials. Radioactive sources have the potential to harm human health and the environment with improper handling, storage, smelting or dumping.

— *UN News Centre*, Sept. 27, 2005

RESOURCES

- * **Campaign Against Depleted Uranium**, CADU, Bridge 5 Mill, 22a Beswick Street, Ancoats, Manchester, England, M4 7HR; (440)161-273-8293; Email: info@cadu.org.uk
- * **Institute for Environmental and Energy Research**, 6935 Laurel Ave., Suite 201, Takoma Park, MD, 20912; (301) 270-5500; Email: ieer@ieer.org; Web: ieer.org
- * **International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War**, Kortestrasse 10, 10967 Berlin, Germany; +49-30-6938166; Email: ippnw@ippnw.de; Web: ippnw.de
- * **Institute for Science and International Security**, 236 Massachusetts Ave., NE, #500, Washington, DC 20002; 202-547-3633; Email: isis@isis-online.org; Web: isis-online.org
- * **Low Level Radiation Campaign**, The Knoll, Montpellier Park, Llandrindod Wells, Powys, LD1 5LW, Britain; +01-59-782-4771; Email: bramhall@llrc.org; Web: llrc.org
- * **Nuclear Age Peace Foundation**, 1187 Coast Village Road, #123, Santa Barbara, CA 93108; (805) 965-3443; Email: napf@igc.apc.org; Web: wagingpeace.org
- * **Nuclear Information and Resource Service**, 1424 16th Street NW, #404, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 328-0002; Email: nirsnet@nirs.org; Web: nirs.org
- * **Physicians for Social Responsibility**, 1875 Connecticut Ave. NW, #1012, Washington, DC 20009; (202) 667-4206; Web: psr.org
- * **Radiation and Public Health Project**, 302 W. 86th Street, # 11B, New York, NY 10024; (800) 582-3716 or (610) 666-2985; Email: odiejoe@aol.com; Web: radiation.org
- * **Shundahai Network**, PO Box 1115, Salt Lake City, UT 84110; (801) 533-0128; Email: shundahai@shundahai.org; Web: shundahai.org
- * **World Information Service on Energy**, P.O. Box 59636, 1040 LC Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Email: wiseamster@antenna.nl; Web: antenna.nl/wise