

Nuclear Mob Enjoys Cover-Ups, Lax Oversight

By Bonnie Urfer

With 438 aging reactors operating around the world, the number of dangerous breakdowns is increasing and so is the secrecy surrounding nuclear mishaps, according to an investigative report in the *Wall Street Journal*. A number of government and private agencies keep a record of reactor problems if they receive reports of them from operators or owners. In the case of the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), accident files are deleted from its web site after six months so that a utility or operator shows a clean record. Reactor operators routinely conceal safety problems. Christer Viktorsson, an official in the IAEA's department of nuclear installation safety, told the *Journal*, "We know about many more events that we think should be reported."

The Paris-based Nuclear Energy Agency, part of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, keeps reactor accident reports, as do the London-based World Association of Nuclear Operators and the Institute of Radiological Protection and Nuclear Safety (IRPNS), a government-funded agency in France. Since 2003, French nuclear operator Electricite de France reported 700 significant safety-related events to the IRPNS. However, the Institute passes on to the IAEA only about ten reports each year and the French agency reports only those events deemed useful as learning tools for other operators. Although these reports are available to reactor owners worldwide, many continue to suffer recurring problems including corrosion and valve failures in reactor core cooling systems.

Regulatory records show that at least four serious incidents have occurred at overseas reactors since 2001. Sixteen significant incidents have been noted within the past 20 years, including reactor fuel degradation, a hydrogen explosion and reactor blackouts.

In 1999, a reactor in Japan ran out-of-control for 15 minutes, but only recently was the near disaster reported.

Near Kozloduy, Bulgaria, an event in 2006 — rated a two on the IAEA's one-to-ten severity scale (Chernobyl got a seven) involved the malfunction of the main cooling water

Knoxville's Secret Spill

KNOXVILLE, Tennessee — Since August 2004, the NRC has designated most of its correspondence with Nuclear Fuel Services, Inc. (NFS), a producer of nuclear fuel for Navy submarines, as "Official Use Only." This prevents inspection reports and other materials from being made public. The clandestine policy kept secret a March 2006 uranium spill at NFS's Erwin, Tennessee site for more than a year — until the incident was disclosed in a required annual report to Congress. The spill involved about 35 liters of a highly enriched uranium (HEU) solution that leaked onto the floor in a facility where HEU is "downblended" to allow enrichment for use in commercial reactors. According to the NRC, there were two chances for a criticality accident in which a nuclear chain reaction releases radiation. Luckily this did not happen and workers were reportedly unharmed by the spill. Still, the public was denied its right to know. The NRC has decided that informing the public about nuclear accidents would compromise U.S. security by "allowing terrorists to learn too much about bomb-grade materials." Air and water pollution, and the very real hazards of nuclear accidents have become less important to the NRC than the phantom threats of stolen secrets.

pump. The loss of cooling water required an immediate shut down, but one-third of the control rods failed to insert, and it took six hours to shut down the reactor. Government regulators didn't acknowledge the control-rod problem for 13 days and initially said it had no safety significance. Without the required cold water or a reactor shut down, the fuel would overheat, melt, burn through the reactor containment and cause disastrous radiation releases.

On April 10, 2003, Hungarian workers at the Paks 2 reactor near Budapest evacuated the site after radiation levels went beyond allowable limits. Workers had been "cleaning" mineral deposits from 30 fuel rods in a specially designed tank. Because the tank's cooling system was inadequate, the fuel rods continued their chain reaction and subsequently released radiation. Additional radiation contamination occurred during inspections when employees removed the lid of the tank which then broke and stuck open. It took until January of this year to remove the five tons of deadly fuel. The Hungarian utility MVM Group blamed contractor Framatome, which designed the equipment.

Sweden's Forsmark reactor experienced an off-site power outage and then discovered that half of its emergency backup generators didn't work. Employees scrambled to get generators working in time to prevent a meltdown. Off-site power is needed to circulate cooling water through the thermally (not just radioactively) hot reactor core and waste fuel pools.

At Davis-Besse in Ohio in 2002, severe corrosion of the reactor containment lid (vessel head) was discovered almost by accident. Only 3/16 of an inch of steel kept the reactor

from causing a major radiation disaster. Davis-Besse was shutdown for two years while the vessel head was completely replaced. FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Co., a unit of FirstEnergy Corp. of Akron, later paid \$28 million in fines and admitted to the Justice Department that its employees had lied to the NRC, saying the reactor was safe to operate.

Japan delayed and underreported radiation releases at its earthquake-affected Kashiwazaki-Kariwa reactor in July (see page one). Over 64 problems have been identified at the facility which was built on an earthquake fault line. Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator, admitted that its leak of radioactive water into the Sea of Japan was 50 percent higher than it initially reported. The company also revised its estimate of the number of nuclear waste barrels tipped over by the quake — from 100 to 400. The report says only 40 barrels broke open.

Eighteen companies have told the NRC they intend build a total of 30 new reactors in the coming years with the first to open around 2015. Thirty-one reactors are currently under construction in foreign countries and China, India and Russia have announced plans for dozens more. Egypt, Indonesia and Vietnam are considering building their first commercial reactors. It's a dangerous time to live with nuclear secrecy.



Rad Waste Secrecy in Tennessee

By Bonnie Urfer

The Nuclear Information and Resource Service in Washington broke the story last May: radioactive materials are ending up in municipal landfills. (See Summer 2007 *Quarterly*, p.1)

Without any public disclosure, the state of Tennessee and the DOE's "Bulk Survey for Release Program" (BSFR) have allowed radioactive waste to be dumped into ordinary state landfills for at least 20 years. One such dump is the Middle Point Landfill in Rutherford County, owned by Allied Waste. The dump is next to the now-contaminated East Fork Stones River which supplies drinking water to 25,000 Murfreesboro and Rutherford County citizens. Ten million pounds of radioactive waste was dumped into Middle Point in 2005, and 166,000 pounds in 2004. The trenches are shielded by 1/4-inch of plastic and 2 feet of clay — now 20 years old. In 1998 or 1999, a contractor drilled a hole through the plastic lining and into the clay at Middle Point for the collection and extraction of landfill gas. The breach was acknowledged by Allied in April 2000 and patched — and the state claims there was "no danger to the public."

The dump area was first rezoned in 1987 by the two original landowners who then sold it, along with their state landfill permit, to BFI (now Allied Waste) for \$10 million. Now Middle Point/Allied takes in 17 percent of all the garbage buried in Tennessee — some 1.2 million tons a year. Trucks roll through Rutherford County from across the country with everything from Nashville's partially-treated sewage, to radioactive waste from California and other states.

Two hundred people attended an August 2 meeting to get answers and end the secrecy around Middle Point and four other Tennessee dumps. Locals and the Murfreesboro Council demanded a moratorium that went into effect on June 28, banning further radwaste deposits. Residents requested that the state end its program in the absence of clear, scientific evidence that the BSFR does not endanger public health. Now the State Municipal Solid Waste Advisory Committee has been tasked with reviewing BSFR and will present its conclusion September 3, the day the dumping moratorium ends. The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation will present its recommendations to the committee August 16.

In the meantime the state and county have been taking a pro-nuke dog and pony show on the road with Geiger counters to prove that a radioactive environment is "natural." Concrete and granite are shown to make the counter click. This act obscures the fact that contaminated landfills poison groundwater and wells. If radiation exposure from concrete is like sitting by a warm fire, then drinking radioactive water is like popping a hot ember into your mouth.

Tennessee developed the BSFR program in 1997 specifically to accept radioactive garbage on a case-by-case basis. Public disclosure never occurred in spite of a public meeting in 2004 concerning a 70-acre expansion and 30-year permit for the dump. Residents believed they had only household waste as a neighbor. "This is a program that operates under very conservative controls. It is surveyed and resurveyed. Once the material gets to the landfill, it would be no more radioactive than any other construction debris," said Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation spokeswoman Tisha Calabrese-Benton. Tests of Middle Point Landfills leachate — water collected from the landfill lining — showed higher levels of some radioactive particles, including tritium, than the EPA allows in drinking water, but nothing that

would be dangerous, according to Benton. A transport line at the site leaked in June.

Rutherford County provided \$20,000 for further testing of wells and the Stones River. Consolidated Utility District, which supplies water to much of Rutherford County, is also running tests on its water supply to determine if there are increased levels of radioactivity.

State Senator Jim Tracy is developing legislation for the January 2008 session that would ban all radioactive waste dumping in Tennessee. Citizens to End Nuclear Dumping is organizing opposition to nuclear imports. There are even rumblings of civil disobedience to stop Allied Waste.

Potentially radioactive Tennessee landfills include: Middle Point, North Shelby County, South Shelby County, Chestnut Ridge in Anderson County and Carter Valley in Hawkins County.

Send written demands for clean up of radioactive waste in Tennessee to: Joyce Dunlap, TN Department of Environment and Conservation, 8th Floor, L&C Tower, 401 Church St., Nashville, TN 37243; Joyce.Dunlap@state.tn.us

Australia Joins GNEP, Outback Eyes Dump

By Bonnie Urfer

The Ngapa clan at Muckaty Station, 300 miles south of Katherine, Australia, have nominated one square mile of their land to be used as a low- and intermediate-level nuclear waste dump site. Australia's Nuclear Science and Technology Organization needs a dump for its waste fuel and contaminated trash from its Lucas Heights reactor. In exchange for importing the waste and relinquishing control of the area for 200 years (the waste will remain deadly for 300,000 years), the Ngapa people and an additional clan would receive a one-time payment of \$9.1 million. Peter Garrett, the Labor Party's environmental speaker, has said the local Aboriginal community was not properly consulted and had been denied the right to appeal. The Northern Territory Government and two additional Muckaty Station clans oppose the waste plan. In spite of opposition, Australian Science Minister Julie Bishop claimed the country could have its first nuclear waste facility open within four or five years.

In a separate nuclear deal, Australia and the U.S. have begun talks about high-level nuclear cooperation and Australia's inclusion in the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership. The GNEP club includes the U.S., Russia, Japan, China and France and is intended by the Bush administration to control the world's entire nuclear fuel cycle from processing to disposal.

The U.S., with 104 operating nuclear reactors, is desperately seeking a dumping ground and Australian environmentalists fear becoming a global waste magnet. Senate Green leader Bob Brown promises stiff opposition in Parliament to any attempt to repeal Australia's prohibition against new reactors. The Labor party concurs. Brown says regional neighbors like Indonesia and Malaysia will be aggrieved by Australia's decision to join the GNEP.

Prime Minister John Howard says he supports new reactor construction but rejects the idea of importing foreign radioactive waste. "In general terms, we are absolutely in favor of working with [the U.S.] on safeguards, on research and looking for safer and better ways of developing the peaceful nuclear industry. Why wouldn't we be?" he said. Australia's Liberal Party Federal Council unanimously called for any imported nuclear waste to be buried in the arid "outback."



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