

NUCLEAR SHORTS

An Iranian Invitation: Inspect it for Yourself

TEHRAN, Iran — If you have ever wanted to see the inside of a pressurized nuclear reactor, Iran could be the next adventure vacation for you. In an apparent bid to convince the world that its nuclear program is peaceful, Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced in November that he would allow foreign tourists [potentially including U.S. spies] access to all nuclear sites in Iran. Now, as the Tourism and Cultural Heritage Organization of Iran studies ways to make this possible, Iranian tour operators are anticipating a boom in business. The United States discourages, but does not ban, its citizens from visiting Iran, according to the State Department's web site. — *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 2006

Workers Contaminated at Areva & EcoSolutions

RICHLAND, Washington — One worker was exposed to radioactive hydrogen fluoride vapor Oct. 23 at the Areva nuclear fuel fabrication facility in Richland, Washington. The NRC is investigating the incident, and the "dry conversion" equipment, blamed for the exposure, has been shut down. Two workers entered the dry conversion building and detected an unusual odor, immediately left the process area and reported to the first-aid station. The same evening one of the workers was admitted to the hospital. According to Areva, the radioactive gas leaked from a deteriorated weld. "At the levels believed to be in the process area, the workers would have had to be exposed for at least 30 minutes for there to be long-term health concerns," according to Bob Link, Areva's manager of environmental health, safety and licensing. (See "Falsely assured," p. 3)

In Nov., three workers were contaminated with americium at Pacific EcoSolutions (PEcoS), also in Richland, Washington. One worker not wearing a respirator breathed in the americium. The worker was found to have americium, a radioactive isotope produced by the decay of plutonium, in his lungs.

Dave Dalton, president of PEcoS, said the exact radiation dose was not known. Yet, when speaking to the press Earl Fordham, a Regional Director of the Washington State Department of Health's Office of Radiation Protection, said the dose received by the worker appeared to be near the legal limit for annual exposure. Fordham even claimed the worker was unlikely to see any health effects, all without knowing the workers' exposure. All three employees were given a chelating agent that binds to heavy metals to strip the radiation out of the body. If americium stays in the body, it continues to expose surrounding tissue to radiation, increasing the risk of cancer.

Drums with contamination on the outside had been shipped from an out-of-state customer. Pacific EcoSolution, Inc. treats both low-level radioactive waste and rad waste mixed with hazardous chemicals from commercial nuclear reactors, hospitals, DOE facilities, etc. — Richland, Washington's *Tri-City Herald*, Nov. 2 & 4, 2006

Illegal Nuclear Waste Dumping in the Pacific

THE PHILIPPINES — A barge named *Cheryl Ann* being pulled by a tug named *Jacob* en route to the Philippines was intercepted by officers of the Enforcement and Security Services of the Bureau of Customs and found to be hauling an estimated one million liters of liquid nuclear waste intended for unregulated and illegal dumping in the waters of the Philippine Islands. The radioactive waste came from the Aimeliik reactor on the island nation of Palau. According to the Philippine Bureau of Customs, this is not the first shipment of nuclear waste intended for illegal dumping in and around the Philippines. Customs Commissioner Napoleon Morales, who ordered an investigation into the incident, said that charges would be filed against those responsible and "Definitely," he added, "heads would roll."

— *The Manila Times*, Sept. 5, 2006

Radioactive Sewage Disposal

PEMBROKE, Ontario — In a glowing plan set forth by SRB Technologies of Pembroke, Ontario, radioactive tritium would be dumped into the city's sewers where it would mix with sewage flushed by residents, in the vain hope for "immediate dilution" before emptying into the Ottawa River. SRB Technologies makes glow-in-the-dark lights that do not run on electricity, but tritium. Not surprisingly, the groundwater around SRB's facilities is contaminated with tritium. One well has radioactivity levels eight times the Ontario drinking water standard. After a brief shutdown, the company was allowed to resume production, though only on days that it didn't rain. The company is presently seeking a way by which it could catch the contaminated rain water runoff and hold it in tanks and then be allowed to release the contaminated water into the Ottawa River. An unnamed spokesperson was chosen to deliver the line that makes us all shudder, "no significant risk to the public would exist as a result of releases of the diverted rainfall." — *Bell Globe Media Publishing*, Oct. 26, 2006

Yucca Mountain Dump Boosters Pushing Hard

WASHINGTON, DC — Senator Pete Domenici, R-NM, has introduced legislation that would put under DOE jurisdiction 147,000 acres of land around Yucca Mountain that is now controlled by either the Bureau of Land Management, the

Air Force or the Nevada Test Site. Domenici's bill includes all land required by a proposed rail system to move reactor fuel rods from 131 sites around the country. The bill, if approved, would also raise the amount of waste allowed at the ill-fated Yucca Mt. site, now limited to 70,000 tons.

Dump opponents say the legislation can't overcome the scientific roadblocks that plague the site, the most recent of which is a report about ancient volcanoes in the area. Greg Valentine, a government volcanologist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, wrote the report which appears in the November issue of the *Bulletin of the Geological Society of America*.

The Nuclear Waste Acceleration to Yucca bill — or NU-WAY — even allows military waste to be accepted at Yucca Mt. after the NRC approves an above-ground storage facility at the site, slated for 2010, with civilian waste soon to follow. — U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Sept. 27; United Press International, Oct. 3; & *Discovery News*, Nov. 8, 2006

Don't Drink the Well Water

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho — The Eastern Snake River Aquifer has most likely been radioactively contaminated by the federal Idaho National Engineering Laboratory (INEL). At INEL, enriched uranium has for years been separated from irradiated reactor fuel, most of which is from shipboard propulsion reactors. A so-called "Idaho Cleanup Project" is being attempted, at a cost of \$2.9 billion, at buildings and reactors no longer in use at the 870-square-mile site.

"We're not even watering the grass," said Amy Lientz, the project's public relations director. The aquifer is 60 miles wide and 170 miles long, covers about 10,800 square miles and holds about 250 million acre-feet of water. An acre-foot is enough water to cover an acre a foot deep. Idaho's Department of Water Resources estimates that about 7,500 of Idaho's 10,000 irrigation wells take water from the Snake River Aquifer, as do about 47,000 of Idaho's 70,000 domestic drinking water wells. From 1952 to 1970, INEL workers pumped more than 16 billion gallons of radioactive wastewater into "injection wells" that were drilled directly into the aquifer. — [Helena, Montana] *Independent Record*, Nov. 16, 2006; EPA, Nov. 2005; *Deadly Defense: Military Radioactive Landfills*, 1988, p. 51.

Nuclear-Free Zone Opposed by Nuclear-Armed States

CENTRAL ASIA — Highlighting government nuclear hypocrisy, the five former Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan signed a new treaty setting up a nuclear-free zone in Central Asia — against fierce opposition from the U.S., France and Great Britain. Such an agreement should be celebrated as a major step toward a nuclear-free world as well as a comfort to the people of those countries who have long suffered the fallout from the 500 or so nuclear test explosions conducted by the Soviet Union between 1949 and 1989. Yet the U.S. military objected to the loss of a tactical nuclear launch site in a strategic area of the world, close to Afghanistan, close to Iran and close to the vast energy reserves in the Caspian Basin. The Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone joins four others in renouncing nuclear weapons; Latin America, parts of Africa, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

— *New York Times*; Arms Control Association, Sept. 15, 2006

Radioactive Leak in South Carolina

PLATTS, South Carolina — The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control announced that cracks in the walls of concrete waste "vaults" at the Savannah River Site (SRS) were leaking radioactive waste. The leaks were discovered by the DOE which informed the Department of Health and Environmental Control. This was not the first time leaks were discovered at Savannah River. Just two days before the recent leaks were discovered, the Department of Health issued a draft permit allowing the SRS's operators to dispose of millions of gallons of additional waste in similar vaults at the site. Shelly Sherritt, a federal facilities liaison at the state Department of Health and Environmental Control, downplayed the severity of the leak. The liquid that seeped out of the cracks was radioactive, but it was "not a large amount or anything that would cause a groundwater problem." — *Platts News Service*, Oct. 5, 2006

European Nuclear Waste Thrown at the Poor

MOGADISHU, Somalia — The force of the 2004 tsunami swept across the Indian Ocean and killed nearly 300 people in war-torn Somalia. Yet, the storm revealed a far more sinister force affecting poor African countries. European countries have been dumping radioactive waste a short distance offshore for more than a decade. Some of these containers, filled with radioactive waste, lead, cadmium, mercury, flame retardants and hospital waste from Europe, were thrown ashore and broken open by the storm. The UN has said that an "unknown number of people died from breathing toxic dust and fumes." This revelation was only the first layer of abuse. According to the UN Environment Program (UNEP), Italy and Switzerland, among others, have taken advantage of the civil strife in Somalia to strike deals with local warlords allowing unregulated and illegal dumping of toxic waste in return for money to finance their armies. The release of the

deadly wastes resembles the devastation of chemical warfare. Resulting health problems include acute respiratory infections, dry heavy coughing, bleeding from the lungs, abdominal hemorrhaging, skin reactions and sudden death from inhalation. — London *Sunday Herald*, Oct. 1, 2006

Closed 30 Years, NASA's Reactor Still Polluting

SANDUSKY, Ohio — The National Aeronautic & Space Agency's (NASA) Plum Brook research reactor, which operated from 1961 to 1973, has contaminated a creek that flows into Lake Erie's Sandusky Bay. The space agency blames the problem on a pin-hole leak in a fuel rod removed from the reactor core in 1968. The NRC is considering whether more hot-spots need to be removed. All of the Pentolite Ditch — NASA property that lies between the reactor and Plum Brook — will be excavated. Three and 1/2 miles of pipe to be cleaned all lie 46 feet underground. The cost of constructing the small reactor in 1958 was \$15 million. Its decommissioning was first estimated at \$160 million. Now, four years behind schedule, it will cost tens of millions more.

— *Toledo [Ohio] Blade*, Oct. 18, 2006

Plutonium-Spewing California Lab Fined \$ Half Million

LIVERMORE, California — After dozens of previous violations, the DOE has again fined the Livermore National Lab, this time \$588,000, for exposing five employees to plutonium. The DOE found that "chronic airborne radiation levels were identified" for nearly four months. The exposures occurred while workers were packaging nuclear wastes. Initially the private contractor that managed the mobile waste packing facility was fined \$192,500 for its role in the accident. Quick to shirk the blame, a Lab spokesperson held the contractor solely responsible for the exposure. The DOE countered by clearly outlining the federal lab's primary role in the exposure and levying the half-million dollar fine. This fine is the sixth monetary judgment against the University of California-managed lab since 1988. In a disturbing end note, no one is obliged to pay the \$500,000 — the university is exempted by statute from nuclear safety fines and penalties. So, with no real responsibility for worker safety or environmental health, look for further carelessness and meaningless fines to be exacted against the troubled Livermore Lab.

— Tri-Valley CAREs' *Citizen's Watch*, March 2006

Steam Blast Shuts Down Nuclear Reactor

SURRY, Virginia — Two nuclear reactors were shut down recently after steam in a turbine building blew the sheet metal siding off the building and onto the nearby power lines that supply electricity to the reactor's safety systems. Dominion Resources, the owners of the reactor, are trying to figure out why the steam was released in the first place. Water is heated by the reactors and is transferred through pipes to the turbine building. Once the giant pipes enter the turbine building, the pipes with the heated radioactive water feed into tubes that are filled with water that never touch the radioactive water. The nonradioactive water is heated and turns to steam, which powers a turbine and generator that send electricity to the power grid. Dominion was quick to point out that the steam was nonradioactive. The reactor was shut down while repairs were made.

— [Hampton Roads, VA] *Daily Press*, Oct. 9, 2006

Resources Mentioned In This Issue

- * **Alliance for Nuclear Accountability**, Washington, DC; Phone (202) 544-0217; Email: ananucle@drizzle.com; Web: ananuclear.org
- * **Alliant Action**, Phone: (651) 388-4814; Email: tom@circlevision.org; Web: circlevision.org
- * **Anathoth Community Farm**, Luck, WI, (715) 472-8721; Email: anathoth@lakeland.ws; Web: anathothcommunityfarm.org
- * **Arms Control Association**, Washington, DC; Phone: (202) 463-8270; Web: armscontrol.org
- * **Arms Trade Resource Center**, New York, NY; Phone: (212) 229-5808; Web: worldpolicy.org
- * **Campaign Against Depleted Uranium**, Manchester, England; Phone: +44 - 0 -161-273-8293; Email: info@cadu.org.uk; Web: www.cadu.org.uk
- * **Christian Peacemaker Teams**, Chicago, IL; Phone: (773) 277-0253; Email: peacemakers@cpt.org; Web: cpt.org
- * **Citizens for Peace in Space**, Colorado Springs, CO 80901; Phone: (719) 389-0644
- * **Don't Waste Michigan**, Holland, Michigan; Email: auntsnake@aol.com; Web: dwmi.homestead.com
- * **Friends of the Earth-Europe**, Brussels, Belgium; Phone: +32-2-542-6105; Web: foeurope.org
- * **Jonah House**, Baltimore, MD; Phone: (410) 233-6238; Email: disarmnow@verizon.net
- * **Loaves & Fishes Community**, Duluth, MN; Phone (218) 728-0629; Email: obedsinduluth@yahoo.com
- * **Michigan Environmental Council**, Lansing, MI; Phone (517) 487-9539; Email: info@mecprotects.org; Web: mecprotects.org
- * **Nuclear Information & Resource Service**, Takoma Park, MD; Phone: (301) 270-6477; Email: nirs@nirsnet.org; Web: nirs.org
- * **Pittsburgh Organizing Group**, Pittsburgh, PA; Email: pog@mutualaid.org; Web: organizepittsburgh.org
- * **Rocky Mountain Institute**, Snowmass, Colo.; Phone: (970) 927-3851; Web: rmi.org
- * **School of the Americas Watch**, Washington, DC; Phone: (202) 234-3440; Email: info@soaw.org; Web: soaw.org
- * **Student Farmworker Alliance**, Immokalee, FL; Phone: (239) 657-8311; Email: organize@sfalliance.org; Web: sfalliance.org
- * **Tri-Valley CAREs**, Communities Against a Radioactive Environment, Livermore, Calif.; Phone: (925) 443-7148; Email: marylia@earthlink.net; Web: trivalleycares.org
- * **Vandenberg Action Legal Defense Fund**, Web: vpeaceldf.org
- * **Witness Against Torture**, Phone: (347) 683-4928; Web: witness torture.org