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Fighting the "Nuclear Renaissance" – or is it 'Relapse?'

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For several years now the nuclear industry and its allies have been waging a new campaign to improve its public image and acceptability. They and their friends in the media and the Bush Administration are now speaking of a "nuclear renaissance" -- a comeback which will result in the ordering of new reactors.

They have been working hard to get all the pieces they needed in place: relicensing of old reactors; quieting fears and complaints about reactor vulnerability, post-9/11; selection of Yucca Mt. as the national high-level radioactive waste dump; and now, new reactor designs and site selection. Three intrepid utility groups have boldly announced to the NRC their intentions to get "early site permits," the first step in moving towards constructing new reactors. One of these utilities is Illinois' own Exelon Corporation, the nation's largest nuclear utility, which has applied for an ESP at the downstate Clinton reactor site sandwiched between Urbana/Champaign and Bloomington, IL.

The industry has been making other plans as well, as will be seen in this issue of **NEIS News**.

They will also be challenged at every step of the way.

NEIS' 2004 Program is geared specifically to oppose new reactor construction and relicensing. And NEIS is one of 4 local co-sponsors for a major national nuclear event scheduled for October in Chicago, featuring Dr. Helen Caldicott and numerous other nuclear critics.

It's not a renaissance – it's a relapse.

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Closing the Circle, Making the Links: "Normalizing" the Increasingly Radioactive Environment

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[NOTE: This piece was a presentation given by NEIS Director Dave Kraft before an audience in Marburg, Germany, on June 30, 2004.]

Two strongly opposing, and very significant trends are emerging in the World today on issues dealing with ionizing radiation.

The first comes from the nuclear industry and its supporters in governments and international agencies and institutions. In general it is calling for an expansion of ALL things nuclear, a "nuclear renaissance." This expansion can only take place if the idea of being increasingly irradiated becomes more "acceptable," or "normalized" in the minds of the uneducated public.

The second trend comes from nuclear critics and opponents, with substantial corroboration and confirmation coming from more conservative, traditional science, medicine and other institutions. This trend is the recognition that, the more we know about the effects of ionizing radiation, the more we realize that low level radiation causes more harm than previously thought.

These two world trends are not only incompatible; they are mutually exclusive. Only one can survive.

We will share with you some thoughts and developments on this emerging conflict that have come to light in recent years.

THE "NUCLEAR RENAISSANCE" – OR IS IT A "RELAPSE?"

Historically, ever since U.S. President Eisenhower called for "Atoms for Peace," both the nuclear industry and its allies in power (governments, international agencies like the IAEA and UN, financial markets and investors, etc.) have consciously attempted to keep the so-called "peaceful atom" separated in people's minds from the "atoms for war." Images of mushroom clouds from both the historical use at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or from the potential of World War Three incinerating the planet would not be conducive to getting more nuclear reactors licensed worldwide; the public would simply rebel. Even though in the U.S., private utilities were more or less blackmailed and bribed into participating in the nuclear age, they welcomed and fostered this artificial separation. That is, until the expansion of the industry ground to a halt in the late 1970's, and the expense and technological difficulties began to increase out of control.

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The U.S. never built the 1,000 nuclear reactors that President Richard Nixon called for in the early 1970's; nor did the world ever reach the 10,000 expected to be in operation by the year 2000. When costs soared, the nuclear industry – at least in the U.S., where this artificial separation was more important, and perhaps more accepted -- welcomed any opportunity to “sell” its product, no matter how close the sales brought it to being perceived as an uncomfortably similar, if not twin sibling of nuclear weapons industry – with all the negative effects that this meant. In order to survive, let alone expand, the nuclear industry has had to do several things:

- 1.) weaken existing standards, laws, and prohibitions in the areas of both operation of the plants, and the amount of radioactive exposure the workers and public would be “allowed” to receive; more irradiation, in more ways simply had to be tolerated by society;
- 2.) Using marketing and “double-think” language, transform its liabilities into benefits for society; since it couldn't realistically solve its irradiation problems in reality, it would have to “linguistically de-toxify” the problems – meaning, “this stuff may be deadly, but it IS legal, so it's okay.”
- 3.) Finally, after winning the marketing and perception wars, it would have to position as absolute NECESSITIES for society, not merely options or choices all its various separate industries and markets: electricity, war, medicine, food treatment; and in this way, they become so “necessary” that they would be allowed to continue, no matter what additional harm these industries would bring. Society would not be allowed to go back to non-nuclear options once these industries were positioned properly.

We see ample evidence of this strategy in every aspect of today's nuclear industry. For example:

- The public may not ever accept nuclear reactors or nuclear waste, but they are being told in the U.S. that food irradiation using cobalt and cesium sources is absolutely essential to the public health and safety, even though it ignores or cannot solve fully two-thirds of the problems associated with food borne contamination from salmonella and E. coli bacteria, for example. Re-contamination AFTER irradiation often occurs, and the irradiation process creates chemical free radicals in the foods, which create their own unique problems in the body;
- For the 5th time in 14 years in the U.S., federal regulators are attempting to “deregulate” certain materials currently classified as low-level radioactive wastes for unrestricted use, to be recycled into consumer products, such as autos, toys, housewares, jewelry, etc. – “linguistic detoxification,” harmful waste today becomes a baby's toy tomorrow;
- In the science realm, some nuclear cheerleaders are resurrecting the long-discredited “hormesis” theory of radiation exposure – little radiation exposures are actually beneficial -- and in the U.S., the media loves to report this;
- When you can't get the data to work for you to support your case for increasing radiation exposures, you simply change the standards to fit the unfavorable data. This is the “process” going on at the controversial high-level radioactive waste site proposed for Yucca Mt., Nevada, in the U.S. Extensive re-writing of the rules and erosion of the standards have simply destroyed the credibility of the project, and any hopes that HLRW MIGHT even be contained there safely.
- Civilian nuclear reactors for the first time ever are now under contract with the U.S. Dept. of Energy (DOE) to manufacture tritium for use in nuclear weapons. In the U.S. the federal DOE previously had its own production reactors, which became old and too dangerous to operate. Enlisting the help of the commercial nuclear power industry may have solved the tritium problem, but it also clearly signaled the public that the separation between atoms for peace and war no longer exists, if indeed it ever truly did. [NOTE:

Since 1950 in the U.S., the DOE and its predecessor organizations have spent nearly twice as much money managing the nuclear weapons production infrastructure in the U.S. as they have on domestic energy resources and programs.]

- “Depleted uranium” weapons (DU) have become the wonder-weapon of the U.S. military, used extensively in Iraq twice, the Balkans, and Afghanistan (and possibly Panama), and it comes from a “waste product” left over from the manufacture of commercial nuclear reactor fuel; why treat a waste product as a costly expense, when it can be made useful at low or no cost, the U.S. Army reasons. As you will hear later, millions of civilians and hundreds of thousands of military personnel have already been exposed to this new source of ionizing radiation, both in war and at home.
- Finally, the entire notion of the so-called “conventional” warfare and battlefields becomes blurred by the *de facto* acceptance and “normalization” of the radiologic battlefield through use of DU and other uranium weapons; while certainly radioactive and chemically toxic, they are not “fissile materials,” so few governments seem to mind or object. As long as there's no mushroom cloud, they must be okay -- and, they work. If they become “indispensable” weapons, we couldn't possibly stop using them then.

THE BARRICADE TO THE “RENAISSANCE”: THE PARADOXICALLY HARMFUL EFFECTS OF LOW-LEVELS OF IONIZING RADIATION

Just when the nuclear industry would like to declare victory for its “renaissance,” comes new, controversial and contradictory evidence from independent sources that declare impossible the essential need of the nuclear industry for the public to be required to accept more irradiation: LOWER levels of radiation exposure may be FAR MORE harmful than previously thought, observed, or calculated. The “precautionary principle” – when dealing with uncertainty regarding issues that could cause great harm, make the MOST cautious choices and decisions – would therefore argue AGAINST increasing public exposure to ionizing radiation. Some of the more recent developments in this important area of public and environmental health include:

- A very harmful and totally unexpected “by-stander effect” has repeatedly been observed to take place in cells nearby to those which have been directly irradiated, indicating that cells can be harmed even when not DIRECTLY irradiated;
- New understandings of radiation risk have discredited the very standards and models currently in use by national and international health agencies which have historically set the standards for exposure to ionizing radiation; these new insights suggest not only that the current standards are too lax, but that they reflect a significant misunderstanding of what is going on when someone is irradiated. Organizations like the European Committee on Radiation Risk (ECRR) have called into serious question the risk-assessment model used by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to set exposure standards for the workforce and general public. Historically these agencies have not accounted for differences between internal and external exposure to ionizing radiation, a huge mistake, the critics like ECRR contend.
- Increasingly, independent researchers are conducting their own studies and research into exposed populations, and these findings are strongly challenging the conventional standards and official pronouncements on radiation effects; this is especially true regarding the issue of exposure to DU, where strong anecdotal evidence gathered by independent researchers in Iraq and Afghanistan totally contradicts the official line coming from the U.S. and U.K. governments and military concerning exposures.
- Other organizations have begun exposing the collusion and conflict of interest existing between agencies which are supposed to protect the public – such as the U.N.'s IAEA and WHO – and the nuclear industry. For example WILPF activist and former EU parliamentarian Solange Fernex has publicly called for the IAEA

to abandon such collusion which prevents the WHO from publicly releasing results on radiation exposure that contradict the "official line" of the IAEA -- a selective censorship which prevents the public from hearing research results potentially damaging to the nuclear industry.

- Independent researchers, fed up and skeptical with the positions of mainstream institutions, are initiating their own epidemiological studies and creating new, interdisciplinary investigations into the effects of ionizing radiation. While these "anecdotal" methods are necessary, and are uncovering important discoveries, they suffer from lack of acceptance by the traditional, mainstream scientific and medical communities, which conduct their investigation in more formal ways. Some are seeking ways of bridging the gap between these two modes of investigation and research, so they can perhaps compliment one another.

The findings of these independent researchers have placed an immovable object in the path of the "nuclear renaissance." The industry cannot win this fight as long as this information grows and becomes public. You will hear specifics about some of the issues mentioned above at the upcoming "Nuclear Power and Our Children" conference in Chicago in October from activists at the forefront of the fight to stop the nuclear industry's plans.

NEIS Notes

NEIS Welcomes New Midwest Office Director:

NEIS has gone under several office transitions since the relocation of Director Dave Kraft in 2003. Recently, the Board formally invited Emerald Young to become its Midwest Office Director. Emerald has a long history of work with peace and other activist groups in the Chicago area. She had been hired by NEIS in 2003 to revamp the bookkeeping system for NEIS, a task she completed successfully. She did extensive volunteer work for NEIS on the issues in 2003, and so became a strong candidate for the position. She brings extensive office skills to the NEIS office, and an enthusiasm to fight the nuclear industry. Welcome aboard, Emerald!

NEIS to Co-Sponsor Major National Anti-Nuclear Event:

NEIS, North Suburban Peace Initiative, and the Chicago Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility are co-partnering with the Nuclear Policy Research Institute, the national anti-nuclear organization created by Dr. Helen Caldicott to present "Nuclear Power and Our Children's Health - What You Can Do" in Chicago, October 15-16. The event will take place at St. Scholastica High School on Chicago's north side (see NEIS website for flier and registration form). General registration will be \$40 for both days, with lower costs for students. Two optional fundraising dinner events will be held. The Conference feature experts on many aspects of nuclear power and weapons risks and contamination of the public.

Registration is being handled online at the NPRI website at:

www.nuclearpolicy.org

If you need a registration form for mailing or faxing, contact the NEIS office, and we will send one to you. Many volunteers will be needed for this event, so contact NEIS -- ASAP. We will need people helping with promotion; with food and refreshment acquisition; hosting guests and speakers from out of town; chauffeurs; staffing and setting up the event, and much more. Call us today if you can donate time, services, or money to help defray travel costs for presenters.

NEIS Marches for Safe Energy in 4th of July Parade:

Once again NEIS volunteers marched in the now legendary 4th of July Parade:



From the left holding the banner are Betty Kaufman, Emerald Young, and Larry Roth. Five others volunteered and marched. The photo is courtesy of NEIS member Marjorie Fisher.

New Tools to Fight Nuclear Power Available at NEIS:

NEIS has recently help develop two important tools for activists to us to help fight nuclear power.

Soon available for downloading from our website are two community health surveys, one aimed at the general public, one aimed at populations suspected of exposure to depleted uranium (DU). Both are modeled after a survey successfully developed and conducted by Green Audit in Wales, around the Hinkley Point nuclear reactor. The other was modified to collect information from returning veterans, or civilians suspecting exposure to DU from the use or manufacturing of the toxic metal. These were developed to provide lay people with the means to begin collecting their own health data around nuclear facilities, especially in areas where local health officials have been less than helpful or outright dismissive of requests or complaints of potentially exposed individuals. The process bypasses them completely, and provides valuable data to those collecting, and to us when you turn them in. Until they are posted, contact the NEIS office directly if you would like copies of this tool.

Conference Proceedings Available from 2003 DU Conference in Hamburg:

In October 2003, NEIS was a major cosponsor of the World Depleted Uranium/Uranium Weapons Conference held in Hamburg, Germany. This event attracted over 35 presenters and 200+ attendees on the controversial topic of DU use. The complete Conference proceedings are now available from NEIS for \$25, plus \$4 S/H. The 240-page book is also accompanied by a supplementary CD featuring the PowerPoint presentations of several of the presenters. Order your copy today through the NEIS office. NEIS does accept VISA and MasterCard orders; and discounts for bulk purchases are available. Also, visit the Conference website on DU/uranium weapons at:

<http://www.uraniumweaponsconference.de>