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Three Mile Island Resources

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THREE MILE ISLAND ALERT

The Newsletter of TMI Alert - December 2010

Water Use a Major Concern at Region's Nuclear Plants—PPL's plant outside of Berwick uses 29.86 million gallons of Susquehanna River water daily that is not returned to the river. The utility is proposing adding another generating station at that site which would draw another 20 million gallons of water from the river on a daily basis, regardless of seasonal fluctuations, water restrictions, or periods of drought.

All water-cooled nuclear plants use millions of gallons of water daily to cool their superheated reactor cores. It is not uncommon for these plants to cause massive fish kills, discharge chlorinated water, and use chemicals to keep their water intake areas free of clams and mussels.

For years TMI Alert has been raising issues relating to water use, water chemistry, the environmental impact of water use, and public health and safety relating to water use. For the most part, the NRC doesn't consider water issues to be under their jurisdiction, so TMIA has taken its concerns to the Susquehanna River Basin Commission. The Commission, in response to concerns raised by TMIA, accepted a \$500,000 settlement from PPL after finding them out of compliance with Commission regulations. In short, PPL was taking a lot more water from the river than they said they would.

With the nuclear power industry trying to spur a "nuclear Renaissance," and given the public opposition to the siting of nuclear power plants, expect to see more utilities proposing additional units at existing sites. For central Pennsylvanians, that would mean a greater demand for water from the Susquehanna. TMIA will continue its advocacy on this front.

Peach Bottom Seeks Permission to Store Limerick Waste—This fall Peach Bottom asked the NRC for permission to store low-level radioactive waste from the Limerick Generating Station at Peach Bottom. After an initial review, the NRC requested more information from Peach Bottom including the facility's justification for not having installed radiation monitors in its Low-Level Radioactive Waste Storage Facility.

TMIA questioned the wisdom of storing waste from one plant at another. "This is an awful precedent," said TMIA's Eric Epstein. "Nobody signed up to become a high- or low-level radioactive waste site. This is little more than a nuclear shell game that fails to address the core problem of what to do with radioactive waste."

TMIA Questions Resources for Decommissioning Unit 2—A petition filed by TMIA questioning whether adequate resources will exist when it is time to decommission Unit 2 is now being reviewed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The reactor, which has been idle since the 1979 accident, was purchased by FirstEnergy in 2001. In the petition TMIA Chair Eric Epstein asks that the plant owner provide financial guarantees that the money will be there. Epstein contends the decommissioning fund is "grossly underfunded." He notes that the fund only had \$577 million by the end of 2009, though the cost of decommissioning is estimated at \$831 million. The mothballed plant is scheduled for decommissioning when the Exelon-owned Unit 1 closes in 2034.

TMI Testifies on State Spying on Activists—TMIAlert's security consultant, Scott D. Portzline, presented written testimony to a state Senate panel in late-September after it was made public that the state's own Department of Homeland Security was gathering data on safe energy groups and activists and warning law enforcement agencies that such groups could cause trouble. Portzline, who has received government commendations for bringing to light security weaknesses on the websites of the NRC and Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, noted, "The price of activism can be quite high in terms of time, effort and money. But when the government includes your name on a list that makes you a suspect, the costs then threaten your patriotism, your good citizenship, and your moral obligation to get involved."

Peach Bottom Cited for Conduct of Security Guards—On Sept. 16, 2010, the NRC issued a letter to Peach Bottom owner Exelon regarding investigations involving two individuals who allegedly engaged in deliberate misconduct while working at the Peach Bottom plant.

In one investigation, completed on May 14, 2010, the NRC determined that a former Exelon security officer deliberately attempted to provide a substitute urine specimen during a fitness for duty (FFD) test on Sept. 14, 2009. The NRC found that Exelon "promptly identified the attempted subversion" and required the individual to provide a second, observed sample, which tested positive for an illegal substance. Exelon immediately terminated the individual's access authorization, the NRC letter said. Because Exelon properly implemented procedures, the NRC will take no action against Exelon over this issue.

In the second investigation, the NRC examined whether a contract outage employee at Peach Bottom deliberately failed to disclose a previous non-nuclear employment history in which he had been terminated for a positive FFD test. In the investigation, completed on June 3, 2010, the NRC determined that the contract employee failed to disclose this incident on his personal history questionnaire on Sept. 8, 2008. The employee was granted unescorted access to Peach Bottom from Sept. 11, 2008 to Sept. 28, 2008. Exelon learned of the person's positive FFD test in August 2009 when the employee attempted to gain unescorted access to another nuclear plant. At that plant, the employee described a previous job with a non-nuclear company. When that plant operator contacted the non-nuclear company, the positive FFD result came to light. As a result, the non-contract employee was denied unescorted access to that plant and Exelon was notified.

The NRC letter noted that the contract employee did not enter any vital areas at Peach Bottom and did not perform work on any safety-related equipment. However, the employee's action caused Exelon to be in violation of NRC requirements, the NRC said. "Although Exelon was unaware of the contract employee's omission of information regarding the positive FFD test, Exelon is responsible for the adequacy of its Physical Security Plan and background checks to identify past actions and appropriately evaluate the trustworthiness and reliability of applicants for unescorted access," the letter said.

The NRC categorized the violation as of very low safety significance. It was entered into Peach Bottom's corrective action program and was treated as a non-cited violation.

Peach Bottom, TMI & Susquehanna Cited for Minor Safety Violations—During routine safety reviews all three regional plants were found to have minor problems that were promptly corrected. Peach Bottom had a helium leak from a cask storing spent nuclear fuel that was remedied by sealing the leak with a weld. The York County facility was also cited for procedural inadequacies during fuel handling operations and corrective actions are being evaluated.

Inspections at TMI found an unsecured extension ladder against piping in the spent fuel cooler room that posed a hazard that could have caused the pool to leak. They also found a tool cart, apparently unsecured and unattended for several weeks, in close proximity to cooling pumps and a supply valve where it could have caused problems. The inspectors also found reactor control rods that were misaligned and subsequently replaced.

At Susquehanna, an improperly installed gasket in the circulating water system led to the leak of a million gallons of water which flooded the Unit 1 condenser bay to a depth of 12 feet and a 20-day shutdown of the Unit to make repairs.

Exelon to Retire Oyster Creek—Exelon announced in early December it will operate the Oyster Creek Generating Station in New Jersey until 2019, after which the plant will retire. The plant is licensed to operate until 2029. Exelon President and CEO Chris Crane said economic conditions and “changing environmental regulations” make ending operations in 2019 “the best option for the company, employees, and shareholders.” A specific retirement date has not been announced.

Stilp Narrowly Loses Bid for Legislature—Safe energy activist Gene Stilp waged an admirably clean campaign for the state legislature, but lost by a mere 313 votes out of 22,905 cast. As the election drew near, the Republican Party of Pennsylvania distributed flyers referring to Stilp as a “convicted criminal” and a “tax delinquent.” Stilp’s only arrests have been for trespassing on those many mornings he protested at the gates of TMI. One year he mistakenly underpaid local taxes, but paid the \$86 shortage immediately upon being made aware of the error. Admirably, he didn’t stoop to the level of the opposition and ran a clean campaign. Unfortunately, he has campaign debt to retire. Anyone who would like to help can send a check payable to the “Gene Stilp for State Representative Committee” at 1550 Fishing Creek Valley Road, Harrisburg, PA 17112.

Joel Roth Dies at 71—A man TMI Chair Eric Epstein referred to as “the conscience” of the panel President Carter appointed to work with the TMI owner on safety and cleanup issues, died in October of kidney disease. Roth served for more than a decade as a “citizen” on the panel that included scientist and government officials. His willingness to serve made the plant safer. Since his kidneys failed 15 years ago, Roth would undergo kidney dialysis three times weekly. Memorial contributions may be made to: The Kidney Foundation of Central PA, 4813 Jonestown Road, #101, Harrisburg, PA 17109.

Sen. Casey Challenges Nuke Waste Shipments on Great Lakes—Sen. Bob Casey joined with six other Democratic U.S. Senators to put the brakes on a risky radioactive waste shipment that would traverse Lake Huron, Lake Erie, and Lake Ontario on its way to a recycling plant in Sweden. Owners of the Bruce nuclear power station on the Canadian shore of Lake Huron have asked the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) for permission to ship 16 school bus-sized, 100 ton radioactive steam generators on a single boat through the lakes, up the St. Lawrence, and across the Atlantic. Sen. Casey, joined by Senators Feingold (WI), Durbin (IL), Stabenow (MI), Schumer (NY), and Gillibrand (NY) wrote the CNSC urging that the highest environmental assessments be undertaken before this shipment is permitted to enter U. S. territorial waters. The Great Lakes represent 20% of the surface fresh water on Earth and supply drinking water to 40 million.

Australians Organizing 2015 Walk for a Nuclear-Free Future—Walks are being planned for Japan, Australia, the U.S. and Canada with a focus on uranium mines, nuclear reactors, waste dumps, and weapon sites. For more information, visit their website at: www.footprintsforpeace.net.

Most Commercial Nukes Have Leaked Tritium—In a document released in September, the NRC states, “There are 65 sites with operating commercial nuclear power plants in the United States. Records indicate 37 of these sites have had leaks or spills that involved tritium in excess of 20,000 pCi/L at some time during their operating history.” The document was compiled in response to numerous questions the Commission has received regarding radiation in ground water wells or municipal drinking water systems. It reports no drinking water has been found to contain tritium at concentrations greater than 20,000 pCi/L. The document notes, “After a radioactive spill or leak, tritium is generally the first radionuclide to be identified in groundwater. This is because tritium travels through the soil faster than other radionuclides. Leaks and spills at some sites (e.g. Indian Point, Braidwood) involved nuclides other than tritium (e.g. Cobalt-60, Cobalt-58, Cesium-134, Cesium-137, Strontium-90, Nickel-63), but those radionuclides are not included in this list.” The list included the Susquehanna and Peach Bottom plants among the 37 leakers.

Push Expected to Revive Yucca Mountain Program—The GOP dominated 112th Congress is expected to entertain efforts to reinstate the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste program halted by the Obama Administration, according to the co-chairman of a national task force supporting the project. David Wright, a Public Service Commissioner in South Carolina, where thousands of tons of nuclear waste are stored, told a pro-nuclear group the new Republican-dominated House might be more receptive to efforts to restore the program. He noted that a clear disposition path for spent nuclear fuel and defense wastes would help the nation's anticipated "nuclear Renaissance" move forward with confidence.

Peace Calendars Once Again Available from TMIA—The Syracuse Cultural Workers are offering their Peace Calendar for the 40th consecutive year. This popular calendar, which includes more than 200 entries based on the late Howard Zinn's People's History, lists for \$13.95, but is available from TMIA for a mere \$10.00. The calendar is printed by union printers on 100% Post Consumer Waste (PCW) recycled paper. To get yours, call Kay at 717-233-7897.

Time to Renew—To renew your membership and show your support for Three Mile Island Alert, complete the form below and return it with your check to TMIA, 315 Peffer Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102-1834.

TMI Alert
315 Peffer Street
Harrisburg, PA 17102-1834

Happy Holidays from all your friends at TMIA

To renew your TMIA membership, please complete this form and return it to TMIA, 315 Peffer Street, Harrisburg, PA 17102-1834

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 \$25 Non-Profit Organization \$100 Patron
 \$10 Low income, student \$250 Former hippie who made it

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