Environmental Defense Institute

News on Environmental Health and Safety Issues

August 2009 **Volume 20 Number 7**

DOE Internal Documents Show Huge Radiation Doses in the Event of an ATR Accident

Department of Energy (DOE) internal documents gained by Environmental Defense Institute, Keep Yellowstone Nuclear Free and David McCoy through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) show radiation doses to workers and the public resulting from a Advanced Test Reactor accident are hundreds of times greater-than disclosed to the public in the published DOE Environmental Impact Statements (EIS). [1]

The Advanced Test Reactor (ATR) was designed in the 1950s and went onto operation in 1969 at the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) using regulatory standards effective at the time with a life design of 20 yrs (1989). DOE intends to continue operating this antiquated nuclear reactor to 2040 regardless of significant "aging" of critical reactor components.[2]

In the event of a severe ATR accident, the table below graphically compares what DOE disclosed to the public in EISs (2000 & 2005) with internal DOE documents and finally current Environmental Protection Agency radiation exposure standards. Clearly, DOE is obligated to explain why it's not telling the whole truth to the public and its workers about the potential risks in continuing ATR operations (already at 40 years). In 2003 INL released 7,794 curies of radioactivity into the atmosphere, of which 1,180 curies are attributed to the RTC/ATR. [3] This significant radioactive public burden must be seen in the context of cumulative doses incurred by not only past/current INL but also past/current Nevada Test Site nuclear bomb test fallout on the region.

ATR Large Break Loss-of-Coolant Accident (LBLOCA) Doses in Rems [4]

LBLOCA Comparison	DOE/EIS [5]	DOE/EIS [6] Only Normal Operations	ATR 100% 250 MW Meltdown (Thyroid) Dose [7]	ATR Whole-Body Dose (TEDE) [8]	Dose Standards Thyroid / Whole-Body [9]
Workers evacuating ATR/TRA	**100**	**0.49**	**369**	**75.7**	**NA / 1-5 [10]**
Workers evacuating INTEC	**7.61**	**N/A**	**80**	**131**	**NA / 1-5**
Public Low-population Zone INL Site Boundary	**0.604**	**1.6×10^{-9}**	**261**	**185**	**0.075 / 0.01 [11]**

Rem – Roentgen Equivalent Man (a unit dose equivalent to person) See Endnote below.
EDE – Effective Dose Equivalent; TEDA –Total Effective Dose Equivalent (Whole Body – internal + external dose)
TRA – Test Reactor Area (now called Reactor Technology Complex) where ATR is located.
INTEC – Idaho National Environmental Center (Formerly Idaho Chemical Processing Plant) located <0.4 mi. from ATR.

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[1] Proposed Consolidation of Nuclear Operations Related to Production Radioisotope Power Systems; DOE/EIS-0373D, 6/05, S-42.
[2] Potential Inadequacy in the ATR Safety Analysis, RTC-USQ-2006-578
[3] DOE/EIS-0373D, 6/2005, pg. 3-26.
[4] Engineering Design File, TRA-ATR-1588, Rev. 1, approved 7/11/00.
[5] Programmatic EIS for Accomplishing Expanded Civilian Nuclear Energy Research and Development and Isotope Production Missions in US, Including the Role of the Fast Flux Test Reactor (NI-PEIS). DOE/EIS-0310, 12/00
[6] DOE/EIS-0373D, June 2005, pg. S-42; This EIS's inadequacy is it does not offer severe ATR accident scenarios (LOCA).
[7] "ATR Confinement Leak Rate", Engineering Design File No. TRA-ATR-1588 Rev.1.
[8] See Foot Note # 5 Above
[9] EPA Environmental Protection Standards (7/08); 40-CFR-191.03
[10] EPA Protective Action Guide, 1992, Stated in DOE/EIS-0310, Section I.1.7.1.1;
[11] EPA, 40 CFR 61, 0.01 rem/yr all air pathways; 40 CFR 141, 0.004 rem/yr drinking water pathway.

DOE was forced to reduce the Advanced Test Reactor power level from its design level of 250 mega-watts (MW) to 150 MW due to serious unresolved reactor safety problems. [12] DOE continues to discount safety problems and increase ATR power to 250 MW and 445 MW to Power Plates. [13] An April 2008 declassified ATR report puts the "Effective Point Power Limit" at 428 MW, which is 71% over the 250 MW operational power limit. [14]

This wide variation in effective power levels within different sections of the ATR core can result in "hot-spots" and exacerbate an already deficient reactor coolant system during an accident. See below on N-16 leaks. Two 2008 ATR shutdowns ("scrams") are attributed to "a sharp increase in dedicated center lobe power" and coolant system "degradation." [15] Two other ATR scrams were reported in 2006 and 2007. [16] Between 2000 and 2008, ATR emergency or unscheduled scrams totaled 12. [17] This number of scrams would be unacceptable in any commercial nuclear power operation and/also the reactors are decommissioned after their typically 20 year design life expires because of "aging" of primary system components.

Unlike commercial reactors, the ATR has no external regulations – even by the Congressionally mandated Defense Facility Nuclear Safety Board (thanks to the Nuclear Navy exemption); and under DOE management these ATR safety issues are mostly ignored.

A persistent and unresolved 1.15 g/min leak [18] in the ATR Primary Coolant System (PCS) N-16 System Center has existed since 1988. [19] "The N-16 System at the Reactor Technology Complex (RTC) is used to determine lobe power distribution of the Advanced Test Reactor (ATR) core **to ensure TSR lobe power limits are not exceeded** and that experiments receive the expected irradiation. The N-16 Center Channel has developed a leak within the reactor vessel which required that the Center channel be aligned to the spare outlet flow transmitter." [emphasis added] [20]

Given the extremely high "Effective Point Power Limit" at 428 MW, which is 71% over the 250 MW operational ATR power limit discussed above and the major inadequacies of the N-16 Channel System to control coolant to these ATR core lobes, no confidence is warranted for safe ATR operations.

During startup of the Advanced Test Reactor on March 8, 2009, it was determined that a primary coolant check valve was not seating properly. Startup preparations were stopped, the primary coolant system was depressurized and the reactor was defueled so the check valve could be replaced. [21]

Despite DOE's claims to the contrary, current internal reports show ongoing ATR safety issues related to seismic vulnerability. "It is noted that the preliminary [seismic scenario] documentation, while prepared under significant time pressure, did not meet expectations for what would be appropriate input for an Engineering Technical Authority Review. Consequently, there is a recommendation that the process be properly documented as suggested above." [22]

The public clearly has no confidence in DOE's self-regulation and ATR seismic safety reports if its own Technical Evaluation Study identifies major unresolved problems.

In yet another current ATR seismic vulnerability "aging" report it states; "In the seismic Loss-of-Coolant Accident (LOCA) all AC power (diesel and commercial) is assumed to be lost, this results in a LOCA and a low flow event. This event has not been analyzed for reflector aging. There is a potential that the margins may be lower

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[12] Potential Inadequacy in the Safety Analysis, TRA-670, RTC-USQ-2005-197, Approved 4/7/05. "Condition 2 and 3 faults are assumed to result in a similar decrease in margins; however, since these are not qualified, the lower total power of 150 MW provides assurance that acceptable emergency [coolant pump] flow will be available." [pg.3]

[13] Evaluation of the Safety of the Situation for PISAs.., Engineering Design File No. 6680, Approved 4/27/06.

[14] Idaho National Laboratory, Doc. No. CCN-213422, April 22, 2008, Advanced Test Reactor Cycle 142A-1 Core Safety Assurance Package, page 20. Also see ATR power at 428 MW, January 31, 2008, CCN-212539, page 20.

[15] Occurrence Report, NE-ID-BEA-ATR-2008-0001, ATR N-16 System Degradation Results in Manual Shutdown.

[16] Occurrence Report, NE-ID-BEA-ATR-2006-0019 and Occurrence Report, NE-ID-BEA-ATR-2007-0021.

[17] Additionally, according to DOE internal documents, between 1973 and 1999 ATR had 16 Scrams

[18] N-16 System Center Flow Channel Leakage, Eric R. Carlson/ ERC/CCO1/INEEL/US, 9/24/08.

[19] N-16 System Operation with C/2 Reentrant Tube Leakage, Interoffice Correspondence, from D. W. Croucher to D.M. Sherick, March 16, 1988, EG&G Idaho.

[20] TRA-670 N-16 Center Outlet Flow Transmitter Instillation, INL Facility Change Form No. 7959, 3/15/04, approved 02/05/07.

[21] NE-ID-BEA-ATR-2009-0003.

[22] Engineering Technical Authority Review of Response of ATR Programs Engineering to Experience-Based Seismic Qualifications, Report, INL, Doc ID. No. TV-345, effective 10/24/08

than reported in Safety Analysis Review (SAR-153)." [23]

A 2008 internal report "Seismic Assessment Project Qualification Status Summary for the ATR" has been completed for all seismic category 1 systems, structures and components (SSC) identified in the Safety Analysis Report (SAR-153). More than 216 "upgrades" are identified as necessary to qualify the SSC to the new seismic standard. In some cases the necessary upgrade involves other than the subject SSC, such as to eliminate a seismic interaction hazard to an otherwise acceptable SSC." [24] This type of revelation is not offered to the general public but only released after years of legal struggles with DOE over Freedom of Information Act requests by EDI and KYNF.

If the ATR were a commercial nuclear power reactor, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission would order the reactor shutdown until all SSC "upgrades" are completed and qualification tests conducted to the satisfaction of the regulators. After conducting "cost-benefit-analysis" most commercial nuclear operators permanently shut-down their aging reactors.

As these internal documents show, DOE engineers are capable of identifying major safety deficiencies; however, the problem is DOE's unwillingness to commit funding for upgrades. DOE relies on secrecy that effectively prevents the public from the truth about the hazards the ATR poses to the region.

Moreover, DOE has effectively stalled (since before 2005) crucial seismic studies by not funding them. "Because the [seismic] National Phenomena Hazards (NPH) assessment described in this plan has not been started, many technical details, such as analytical methods and performance criteria, remain to be developed. Also the TRA/ATR Soil Design Basis Earthquake (DBE) report is still the subject of comment and resolution between NE-ID and the INL contractor." [25]

In DOEs Environmental Impact Statement a "Severe ATR Accident would release 175,000,000 curies of radiation. [26] This is nearly half the radiation released from the former Soviet Union's Chernobyl reactor accident and would cripple the whole south-eastern Idaho and western Wyoming region.

DOE claims that normal ATR operations comply with emission standards, however, internal documents gained by EDI through FOIA show that numerous ATR radiation stack monitor reports document that monitors have not functioned over an extended period of time. [27] Therefore, no public confidence that ATR nuclear reactor operational safely is warranted !

The bottom-line is these DOE actions are boarder line insanity to put the public at enormous risk by not telling the whole truth for past/current ATR emissions and dubious ongoing ATR mission gains !

Update on KYNF/EDI Freedom of Information Act Suit Against DOE

EDI's joint lawsuit with Keep Yellowstone Nuclear Free and David McCoy against DOE for release of ATR "life extension plan" documents is languishing in Wyoming Federal District Court since filing in 2006. [28] We do NOT know about the ATR safety issues because of more than three year delays. [29]

As previously emphasized, the only "security threat" in jeopardy here is DOE's credibility to safely operate the antiquated 40 year-old Advanced Test Reactor that is still operating long after its original 20-year design life. We do not want another Chernobyl or Three-Mile-Island nuclear reactor accident here in Idaho.

Wyoming Federal District Court Judge Downes conducted in-camera review of our requested Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) documents (related to the ATR Life-Extension Plan) in Jackson, WY on April 26, 2008.

The purpose of this review was to give Judge Downes a concrete basis on how to rule on DOE's claim that these documents must be exempt (for national security reasons) from release under our FOIA.

DOE has stated that if Judge Downes rules to release the requested FOIA documents, the Department will appeal the decision, further delaying document release. This is a clear example of the Obama administration failure for a "transparent" government.

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[23] Safety Analysis Review (SAR-153), Chapter 15.15 "Reflector Aging" did not analyze the seismic LOC for early and late margins, RTC,TRA-670-Advanced Test Reactor, RTC-USQ-2006-578, approved 8/21/06.

[24] "Seismic Assessment Project Qualification Status Summary for the ATR," Interoffice Memorandum, September 30, 2008, from S.R.Jensen, engineer, to P. Henslee, Life Extension Manager.

[25] ATR Seismic Assessment Plan, 5/8/07, Doc. No. PLN-588, Rev. ID: 3, Idaho National Laboratory.

[26] DOE/EIS-0310, 12/00, pg. I-6.

[27] DOE Deficiency Report, ICARE No. 40645, Verified, 11/2/07

[28] Keep Yellowstone Nuclear Free, Environmental Defense Institute, at al, v Department of Energy, Complaint, Wyoming Federal District Court, Case No. 06-CV-205-D.

[29] For more information on revelations on ATR documents, see EDI's Newsletters 2009 January to April available at: http://environmental-defense-institute.org/publications.html.

For more information see EDI's updated comprehensive "Unacceptable Risk and the Idaho National Laboratory Advanced Test Reactor, The Case for Closure" available on EDI's website: http://environmental-defense-institute.org/publications

Mercury Rising

By Mary Woollen

The dog days of summer are here, and so is a new threat to our population and greater Yellowstone region. The Jackson community recently learned that the nearby Idaho National Laboratory is one of seven Department of Energy sites being considered for the long-term storage of 17,000 tons of toxic mercury. The need for such a repository is outlined in a 2008 law signed by President Bush called the Mercury Export Ban which requires DOE to designate a facility for the "long-term management and storage of elemental mercury generated within the U.S."

The major concern Keep Yellowstone Nuclear Free has about this recent pronouncement, is that the long-term storage design and infrastructure have yet to be explained to the public. It has been the rule rather than the exception that wherever such toxic substances are stored, and however they are stored—they leak and people ARE exposed. Plutonium and other hazardous poisons have all leaked from "safe storage" at INL and now contaminate the water, soil and air.

Elemental mercury is a shiny, silver-colored metal that remains in a liquid state at room temperature. Exposure to mercury, can damage the central nervous system, endocrine system, kidneys and other organs. Mercury and its compounds are particularly toxic to babies, and women exposed to mercury while pregnant have given birth to children with serious birth defects. A section in the Mercury Export Ban Act calls mercury "highly toxic to humans, ecosystems, and wildlife".

Mercury can travel long distances and deposit in land and water -- directly affecting the water we drink and the food we eat. As described by Representative Albert Wynn (D-MD) who helped craft the legislation, mercury is a, "... trans-boundary pollutant that knows no borders." Mercury is harmful whether it is inhaled, ingested or absorbed through the skin.

Jacksonites would be wise to take the cue from the Idaho Governor who typically welcomes most any DOE projects to his state despite their potential hazards. In a statement released just last week, Governor "Butch" Otter said he would do "everything within his power to keep the U.S. Department of Energy from storing the nation's highly toxic elemental mercury at the Idaho National Laboratory." Unfortunately, his voice gives no assurance this project isn't headed straight for the Idaho desert.

Presently, the long-term management and storage of privately owned elemental mercury is the responsibility of its owners, and government-owned elemental mercury is stored at existing facilities around the country. KYNF believes this is where the mercury should remain instead of hastily switching to a plan that would include the risks of transportation as well as consolidation at a single source, without a proven plan for storing mercury in this magnitude. It also becomes a tempting single and tempting target for terrorism.

Between now and Aug. 17, the DOE will accept public comments regarding potential concerns such as the impacts of mercury on human, animal and plant health, the environment, land use, geology and national security. The public comment period is part of the process of developing the requisite environmental impact statement on mercury storage options. There will be a public hearing on this issue at the Shilo Inn in Idaho Falls on Wednesday, August 11 at 5:30 pm.

Jackson should add its strong voice to those who are also speaking out in Idaho. INL already has more waste than it can handle, and a large portion of it has no long-term disposition plan. Adding Mercury to this already over burdened site should gets everyone's temperature rising.

Mary Woollen is Executive Director, Keep Yellowstone Nuclear Free; www.yellowstonenuclearfree.org

Idaho Governor Otter to Fight Mercury Storage at INL

The Pocatello *Idaho State Journal* reports 7/16/09; "Governor C.L. 'Butch' Otter said he will not allow the U.S. Department of Energy to store mercury in eastern Idaho. 'Not gonna happen,' Otter told KBOI radio.

The Department of Energy is considering the INL as a possible storage site for up to 17,000 tons of mercury. The agency is looking for storage sites because mercury exports will be banned beginning in 2013. The 890-square-mile federal nuclear research complex in eastern Idaho is one of seven sites the department is considering.

A final site or group of sites will be named on Jan. 1, 2010, as long-term storage areas for domestically produced mercury. Mercury is toxic and has been linked to health concerns, including pulmonary and neural disorders.

Otter said he was unaware the Idaho National Laboratory was one of the sites being considered until hearing it in news reports. He said he should have been informed by federal officials. "The first time I heard about it was when I read it in the newspaper," Otter said. "I don't know whether it is arrogance or ignorance at its worst." "No one in our state government and no one in our congressional delegation was aware this was up," said Jon Hanian, Otter's spokesman.

The Department of Energy is accepting public comments through Aug. 17 as part of the process of developing an environmental impact statement. "We are focused on soliciting public comments at upcoming scoping meetings in Idaho and across the country," said Jen Stutsman of the Department of Energy.

Other sites being considered are the Grand Junction Disposal Site in Colorado; the Hanford nuclear reservation in Washington State; Hawthorne Army Depot in Nevada; Kansas City Plant in Missouri; the Savannah River Site in South Carolina and Waste Control Specialists in Andrews, Texas.

Mercury is used in gold mining and manufacturing chlorine and caustic soda, and is reclaimed from recycling and waste recovery operations. Disposal of electronic equipment is a problem because computers, TVs and other devices contain toxic materials such as mercury, lead and PCBs."

Editor's note: EDI thanks Preston Truman for his media research and posting relevant news articles !

Nuke Developer Says He May Move Outside Elmore Co. Idaho |State Disputes Statements in CEO's Announcement

Nate Poppino reports in the Twin Falls, ID *Times-News*; "The developer of a proposed nuclear power plant in Elmore County said Thursday he is considering moving his project elsewhere in the state. But Idaho officials quickly disputed a press release from Alternate Energy Holdings Inc. claiming that the state "offered" land for its planned 1,600-megawatt commercial power plant.

In a press release and a conversation with the Times-News on Thursday morning, AEHI CEO Don Gillispie said delays in the permitting process in Elmore County prompted the state of Idaho and several counties to step forward and offer alternate sites. His company, he said, is now looking at two additional sites outside
the county where the permitting process might move more quickly, and has an application for state land filled out and standing by.

"We're just waiting to pick the land and submit it," Gillispie said, adding that all the new interests had assured him his company could receive a permit by the end of the year. Gillispie declined to identify the interested counties other than saying they are outside of southwest Idaho, arguing that he didn't
want them harassed by critics of his plant until a site is picked. But he said the Idaho Department of Lands also offered him "state lands anywhere in the state," following a directive from Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter's office.

That was news to both the department and Otter's office. Lands Director George Bacon said Gillispie contacted his office some time ago wondering if state land might be available for a plant.

Department staff wasn't sure what such a plant needed, but employees in its southwest office helped him look through some parcels and filled him in on how the application process would go, Bacon said.

Jon Hanian, Otter's spokesman, said the only thing the governor asked Lands to do was fill AEHI in on how the process works and that the company has "not been offered state sites."

The State Board of Land Commissioners would have final say over permitting a nuclear plant on state land, something Gillispie talked up as a plus for developing his plant there. He even looked briefly at state land in Elmore County, he said, before concluding the private farmland he submitted to the county for a rezone was the best choice. "(It's) nothing that couldn't be done in a month," he said of the state's process. But Bacon said his department follows a strict process for permits on state endowment lands. For an unusual request like a nuclear plant, the agency may need a few months just to complete the initial analysis - examining the applicants' finances, business plan and other factors such as environmental risks. More studies, county coordination and other steps would follow that, he said. "It could take many months," Bacon said of the overall process.

Alan Christy, Elmore County's new Growth and Development director, said on his first day of work Thursday that he hadn't heard AEHI was looking elsewhere. The county is moving ahead with processing the company's application after county commissioners referred it back to the Planning and Zoning Commission, he said. The P&Z directed staff at a Wednesday evening meeting to work on an extensive comprehensive-plan analysis and staff report, a project with no set time frame at the moment.

AEHI has already moved its proposed site once, leaving Owyhee County in early 2008 for the Elmore site. Gillispie was ready to pack up and try proposing his plant in Colorado if the Elmore site fell through, he said.
AEHI stock closed at 10 cents a share on Thursday [8/6/09]." [emphasis added]

US Air Force Sets Up New Command for Nuclear Forces

***A**gence France Presse* published 8/7/09 that: "The US Air Force launches a new Global Strike Command responsible for nuclear forces after two major mishaps raised doubts about the supervision of the country's atomic weapons.

US Air Force strategic bombers sit on the tarmac at a base in Louisiana. The US Air Force on Friday launches a new Global Strike Command responsible for nuclear forces after two major mishaps raised doubts about the supervision of the country's atomic weapons. The opening of the command marks a shake-up that followed the botched handling of nuclear weapons and the subsequent sacking of the air force's top civilian and military leaders last year.

The command, located at Barksdale Air Force base in the southern state of Louisiana, will combine nuclear-capable B-52 and B-2 bombers as well as the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) force -- which had previously been under the Air Force Space Command.

"We needed to refocus on the nuclear mission and not lose sight of that," Secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley told reporters ahead of Friday's ceremony. He said there had been some "painful lessons" but the new command would "reinvigorate our nuclear enterprise."

An outside panel headed by former defense secretary James Schlesinger concluded that the US Air Force had for years given the nuclear forces a lower priority and failed to manage the mission with rigor.

The panel found "an unambiguous, dramatic and unacceptable decline in the air force's commitment to perform the nuclear mission and, until very recently, little has been done to reverse it."

Two widely-publicized incidents raised questions over the air force's handling of its nuclear mission.

First came the inadvertent transfer from one US base to another of nuclear-armed cruise missiles under the wing of a B-52 bomber in September 2007. Then the Pentagon discovered that nuclear weapons components had been inadvertently shipped to Taiwan in 2006.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates soon fired the air force's top civilian and military leaders in June 2008.

The ICBMs in the 20th Air Force, part of Air Force Space Command, are due to shift to the new command in early December and bombers from the 8th Air Force are scheduled to move to the command in February, officials said.

Three-star General Frank Klotz will lead the new command, which comprises 23,000 airmen. While the nuclear role would take the top priority, the command would also be ready to employ conventional weapons, including a giant "bunker buster" bomb due to be ready next year, said air force chief of staff, General Norton Schwartz.

The general said the new command included an elaborate inspections regime with regular outside oversight. "We have made a special effort to make the inspections more demanding, more invasive, more challenging," Schwartz told reporters. "My judgment was that perhaps the inspections had not been as rigorous as we needed in the past. So we adjusted that," the general said.

He also said setting up a command would ensure the nuclear forces received equal status with other missions in the air force and would help develop a cadre of airmen with relevant skills. The nuclear forces previously were perceived as a secondary mission, especially after the end of the Cold War. "The key thing here is we ended up focusing on other things and understandably perhaps, but we are now wiser," Schwartz said.

Arms control talks with Russia and a major nuclear strategy review underway at the Pentagon had highlighted the importance of the nuclear forces, Donley said.

Donley and Schwartz discussed the command at a briefing Wednesday at the Pentagon. But the air force barred the release of their remarks until Friday as officers wanted to avoid the announcement coinciding with Thursday's anniversary of the United States dropping an atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945.

The attack killed some 140,000 people, either instantly or in the days and weeks that followed."

The News on Nukes

Frida Berrigan reports 5/8/09; **"**It's not on the front pages of what is left of U.S. newspapers. The headlines are dominated by violence in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq, by Miss America's semi-nude photo scandal, and by the Chrysler fiasco. But just about everyone who is anyone is talking about nuclear weapons this week.

At the United Nations, representatives from the world's 190 or so nations are meeting (in typical fashion) to prepare to meet. The preparatory meeting of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) is taking place the first two weeks of May to get ready for the Review Conference of the Treaty, which will happen next year. Closer to home this week, Congress heard from its Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States. And the Department of Energy released its budget for 2010 requesting $6.4 billion for nuclear weapons programs out of an overall budget of $26.4 billion.

In all of this nuclear attention, there is good, bad and mixed news, all of which is taking place against the background of President Barack Obama's historic Prague speech, in which he pledged to work for a world free of nuclear weapons. The president also identified immediate, concrete measures toward that goal, including negotiating a new treaty with Russia involving deep cuts in our respective nuclear arsenals; seeking ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); accelerating spending designed to eliminate "loose nukes" and bomb-making materials (plutonium and enriched uranium) in Russia and beyond; and ending all new production of bomb-making materials worldwide.

The Good News

Over the last eight years, the United States all but dropped out of the NPT process. The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty entered into force in 1970. It sets up a bargain

between the nations that possessed nuclear weapons at the time — the United States, the Soviet Union, France, China, and the United Kingdom — and the rest of the world. While nuclear-haves work to dismantle their arsenals, the nuclear-have-nots won't pursue nuclear weapons programs. The carrot in the mix was the "peace atom:" allowing non-nuclear states access to nuclear technologies for energy.

The NPT regime has been under assault by the slow pace of nuclear disarmament and the spike in nuclear proliferation outside the treaty by Israel, India, North Korea, and Pakistan. Iran appears to be close behind, and the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission warns that as many as a dozen other nations have the ability to develop nuclear weapons capabilities within the next decade.

The Bad News

Secretary of Energy Steven Chu announced his department's budget requests for fiscal year 2010. Amid a lot of fanfare about renewable resources and sustainability was a Bush-like $6.4 billion for the National Nuclear Security Administration's continued work on nuclear weapons technologies, facilities, and designs. This request is in line with the NNSA's longer term plans for upgrading the nuclear weapons complex over the next two decades, an endeavor that could cost tens and tens of billions of dollars. Besides being expensive, the plan for so-called Complex Transformation was crafted during the Bush administration, and is obsolete now that the Obama administration has pledged to dramatically accelerate the reduction of the U.S. nuclear stockpile. A $6 billion-plus budget for moving forward on nuclear weapons research and development while negotiating for nuclear nonproliferation and pledging a nuclear-weapons-free world sends mixed signals to allies, provides political cover to adversaries, and makes it more difficult to persuade Iran and North Korea to roll back their nuclear programs.

Another Chance

Obama cannot unilaterally get rid of all the United States nuclear weapons tomorrow — even if that's what he wanted to do. But he can halt these expensive and short-sighted nuclear weapons plans with a stroke of his pen when the budget comes back to him in a few months. In that way, he can reconcile the U.S. nuclear weapons budget and U.S. nuclear weapons policy. And that would be good news from Washington for the whole world."

Frida Berrigan is a senior program associate at The New America Foundation's Arms and Security Initiative.

A-bomb Certification Ruling to Stand

A Japanese court ruling, published 6/9/09, favoring those who blamed their illness on radiation from the 1945 atomic bombings will not be appealed, the government said. Welfare Minister Yoichi Masuzoe, who made the announcement Tuesday, was referring to the May 28 Tokyo High Court ruling, ordering the government to certify that the illnesses of the 29 plaintiffs resulted from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-bombings, Kyodo news reported.

The ruling was the government's 18th straight loss in lawsuits over its certification procedures for the A-bomb victims seeking compensation, and could lead to a review of the certification criteria, the report said. In the latest ruling, Presiding Judge Tatsuki Inada said, "The (current) screening rules are inappropriate in certifying atomic bomb-related diseases."

He said those with liver failure and under-active thyroid function should also be included in the certification criteria for A-bomb sufferers. Those winning the certification become eligible for 137,000 yen or about $1,390 a month in medical allowances, the report said.

Preston Truman Comments; "Note how the court ordered the Japanese government to OFFICIALLY list under active thyroid function as an exposure caused event. The very same thing found in the 40 year Utah Thyroid Study on 4,000 of us school age kids, and which promptly had its funding cut when they nailed the link to non-cancerous hypothyroidism after rechecking less than half of us in 2005. One huge reason some health screenings need to be done for all high fallout areas.

Endnotes:

"Rem (roentgen equivalent man) – A unit of dose equivalent. The dose equivalent in rem equals the absorbed dose in rad in tissue multiplied by the appropriate quality factor and possibly other modifying factors. Derived from "roentgen equivalent man," referring the dosage of ionizing radiation that will cause the same biological effect as one roentgen of x-ray or gamma-ray exposure. One rem equals 0.01 sieverts." [DOE 2005]

EDI thanks Dr. Allen B. and Marian Benson and many other major contributors too numerous to list for their ongoing financial support that provides for our research and publication of this newsletter and comprehensive reports.