Environmental Defense Institute

News on Environmental Health and Safety Issues

June - July 2009 **Volume 20 Number 6**

Transuranic Waste at Hanford

Robert Alvarez [1] produced the comprehensive "Transuranic Waste at Hanford" report in May and subsequently presented it to the Department of Energy (DOE) Hanford operations in Richland, WA. This report also covers DOE's radioactive transuranic waste at the Idaho National Laboratory (INL). Below are excerpts of Alvarez's report that states;

"Transuranic (TRU) wastes are contaminated with radioactive elements heavier than uranium on the periodic chart (i.e. plutonium, americium, curium and neptunium). They are generated by the U.S. nuclear weapons program, and to a lesser extent by commercial businesses during the 1960s and 1970s.

"According to EPA regulation (40 CFR 91) these wastes contain more than 100 nanocuries of alpha-emitting transuranic isotopes, with half-lives greater than twenty years. TRU wastes mostly contain plutonium-239, which remains hazardous for hundreds-of-thousands of years. Hanford has about 60 percent of all TRU wastes by volume.

"About 137,000 cubic meters of TRU wastes were "retrievably stored" at DOE sites after 1970 and are now being processed and are going to a deep geologic repository – the Waste Isolation Pilot Project in new Mexico (WIPP).

"WIPP has an authorized disposal capacity of 175,000 cubic meters. About 138,000 cubic meters of TRU wastes were buried at DOE sites prior to 1970 and are not considered a cleanup priority by the Energy department.

Table 1 Total Volume and Radioactivity of Previously Disposed TRU-Contaminated Waste

Site	Volume (Cubic meters)	TRU Activity
Idaho National Engineering Laboratory	36,800	297,000 Ci
Hanford Site (DOE)	75,800	60,000 Ci
U.S. Ecology	5,097	42,800 Ci
Los Alamos National Laboratory	8,620	21,000Ci
Savannah River Site	4,530	18,500 Ci
Oak Ridge Reservation	7,450	1,966 Ci
Nevada Test Site	116	493 Ci

Sources: DOE 2001, NRC 1980, DOH 2004

"About 776 kilograms of Pu-239 -- enough to fuel 129 Nagasaki-size atomic bombs -- were dumped at 55 sites from the 1940's to the early 1970's. At least 16 sites contain average concentrations of transuranics (TRU) greater than 100 nCig (nano-curies-per-gram) -- the DOE standard requiring geological disposal.

"The U.S. Ecology site is a commercial radioactive waste disposal facility operating in the Hanford 200-Area. It is regulated by the Washington State Department of Health under an agreement with the Nuclear

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Regulatory Commission. Between 1966 and 1980, about 5,000 cubic meters of transuranic wastes, containing about 100 kilograms of plutonium were disposed in unlined trenches. In 2004 the WA Health department recommended against removing these wastes.

The Hazards of Plutonium At Hanford

***** Inhalation or ingestion of microscopic amounts of plutonium can cause cancer.

* Plutonium has migrated deep into the subsurface and has contaminated the ground water the flows into the Columbia River.

* According to DOE in 2004, subsurface migration of plutonium at Hanford "is highly enhanced" because it was mixed with acidic liquids and organic solvents.

According to the National Research Council (2000) Long-Term Institutional Management of U.S. Department of Energy Legacy Waste Sites

"… the likelihood that institutional management measures will fail at some point is relatively high."

"Other things being equal, contaminant reduction is preferred to contaminant isolation and the imposition of stewardship measures whose risk of failure is high."

"..much of our current knowledge of the long-term behavior of wastes in environmental media may eventually be proven wrong."

What is being done at Hanford?

"The threat to ground water and the Columbia River from buried plutonium at Hanford appears to be far more serious than other DOE sites. The State of Idaho is forcing DOE to remove buried plutonium for geological disposal.

"Yet DOE and the Washington Health Department propose to not remove large amounts of buried plutonium at Hanford. After decades of delay, cleanup of buried transuranic wastes at Hanford should become a priority."

Editors note: For a complete copy of Robert Alvarez's "Transuranic Wastes at Hanford" that includes the crucial full text, photos, graphs and tables go to; http://environmental-defense-institute.org/publications

Mortality and Cancer Incidence Following Occupational Radiation Exposure: Third Analysis of the National Registry for Radiation Workers

A major British medical journal paper reports that prolonged exposure to radiation is no different from an acute exposure in terms of risk of cancer mortality or cancer incidence. Note that adult thyroid cancer approaches statistical significance. If the findings of this study hold, it suggests a fundamental bias towards under-estimation of risks by National Commission for Radiation Protection (NCRP), International Commission for Radiation Protection (ICRP) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

British Journal of Cancer (2009) reports: "Mortality and cancer incidence were studied in the National Registry for Radiation Workers in, relative to earlier analyses, an enlarged cohort of 174 541 persons, with longer follow-up (to 2001) and, for the first time, cancer registration data. Standard Mortality Rate (SMRs) for all causes and all malignant neoplasm's were 81 and 84 respectively, demonstrating a 'healthy worker effect'. Within the cohort, mortality and incidence from both leukemia excluding chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) and the grouping of all malignant neoplasm's excluding leukemia increased to a statistically significant extent with increasing radiation dose. Estimates of the trend in risk with dose were similar to those for the Japanese A-bomb survivors, with 90% confidence intervals that excluded both risks more than 2–3 times greater than the A-bomb values and no raised risk. Some evidence of an increasing trend with dose in mortality from all circulatory diseases may, at least partly, be due to confounding by smoking. This analysis provides the most precise estimates to date of mortality and cancer risks following occupational radiation exposure and strengthens the evidence for raised risks from these exposures. The cancer risk estimates are consistent with values used to set radiation protection standards.

Estimates of the long-term health risks from ionizing radiation are based largely on studies of the survivors of the atomic bombings in Japan and of groups exposed for medical reasons (Nuclear Regulatory Commission [NRC], 2006; International Commission Radiation Protection [ICRP], 2007; United Nations Scientific Committee on Effects of Atomic Radiation [UNSCEAR], 2008). In view

of the desirability of obtaining data relevant to protracted or low-dose radiation exposures, the National Radiological Protection Board (now the Radiation Protection Division of the Health Protection Agency) started the National Registry for Radiation Workers (NRRW) in 1976. Two earlier NRRW analyses (Kendall et al, 1992; Muirhead et al, 1999a, b) found a strong 'Healthy Worker Effect' (HWE). When cancer mortality was analyzed in relation to external radiation dose, the data were consistent both with existing radiation risk estimates and – for the most part – with the absence of an association. However, after excluding CLL which may not be radiation-inducible (UNSCEAR, 2008), there was borderline evidence in the second analysis (NRRW-2) of an increasing trend with dose in leukemia mortality.

This paper summarizes a third analysis (NRRW-3) that provides more precise information on the risks of occupational radiation exposure based on cancer registrations as well as mortality, data from an enlarged cohort of 174 541 workers, and a further 9 years of follow-up relative to NRRW-2. Further details are given by Muirhead et al (2009).

Editors Note; With respect to unfinished business, EDI feels that more can and should be done regarding the health effects of public exposures to nuclear weapons fallout, especially to radioactive iodine (I-131) and the subsequent risk of thyroid cancer and thyroid disease in later life. We also hope that something can be done to repair lost interest by and lost confidence in Centers for Disease Control (CDC) with respect to their lack of follow-up on fallout issues. The only agency having individual scientists with any interest at all appears to be deep within National Cancer Institute (NCI) (about three persons). EDI felt that the INL dose reconstruction for CDC from 2005 was incomplete and needed to address Nevada Test Site (NTS) and other sources of fallout (as well as the need to account for in all other major sources of Idaho National Laboratory (INL) releases, not just the Idaho Chemical Processing Plant (ICPP) and RaLa). [2] *We are surprised that the public was virtually ineffective in requiring CDC to follow through. Knowledgeable researchers engaged in the study were not allowed to appear before the public on that study. It appears as if CDC was successful in changing the course of National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) Radiation Studies Branch to allow themselves to give a much lower priority to the dose and risk from past public exposures and focus on radiation terrorism instead. The CDC dose reconstruction was never properly peer reviewed (the INEL HES was not technically qualified to do a peer review). Few issues were ever raised on critical issues.*

By the way, the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is now under investigation by Congress "for being too pro-industry biased? We hope the new Obama Administration can make a positive difference, but unfortunately their plate is already overflowing with higher priority issues. We continue to get inside information that a dose-reconstruction of Marshall Is. fallout inside the USA will reveal major heretofore unpublished results, including the fact that west coast locations like Los Angeles were not "low dose" regions (although the cows of most commercial dairies were not fed fresh pasture in the LA basin) and that the humid East would have gotten the highest exposures. The issue is first-passage of fallout plumes. 1954 and 1958 were special years. Of course, if the US got significant amounts of Marshall Is. fallout, so did most everywhere else.

These issues of radioactive fallout from all sources remain a crucial health problem for Americans as the articles blow document.

[2] For more information on Idaho Chemical Processing Plant now called Idaho Nuclear Environmental and Technology Center (INTEC) RaLa radiation releases go to; http://environmental-defense-institute.org/publications/Critiques of CDC INL Dose Reconstruction Health Study.

Nuclear Cleanup Awards Questioned
Firms Cited for Errors Get Funding

Kimberly Kindy reports in the *Washington Post* 5/18/09; "A private company was being paid $300 million by the federal government to clean up radioactive waste at two abandoned Cold War plants in Tennessee when an ironworker crashed through a rotted floor. That prompted a major safety review, which ended up forcing work to an abrupt halt, and the project was shut down for months. The delay and a host of other problems caused cost estimates to rise, eventually hitting $781 million.

Two years ago, some workers who Washington Hanford Closure had hired were caught falsifying documents about their handling of nuclear waste, according to an investigation by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Now, President Obama's stimulus package is opening a bountiful stream of new funding, and the same contractor, Bechtel Jacobs, is slated to get $118 million to help complete the job.

The Energy Department has begun releasing more than $6 billion in stimulus money to clean up 18 nuclear sites from New York to California, more than doubling the typical yearly funding for the program. Contractors helped shape the stimulus package and are lined up to get the work, including many that have been cited for serious

safety violations and costly mistakes.

The contracts -- along with much broader problems in the department's nuclear cleanup program -- have prompted rare, sharply worded warnings from some government officials and lawmakers who say the stimulus funding is ripe for abuse.

The cleanup program has long been plagued by cost overruns and delays and is designated by the Government Accountability Office as "at high risk for fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement." Over the past two years, estimated cleanup costs at all 22 sites have escalated from $180 billion to $240 billion, according to the Energy Department.

"The very contractors that have been responsible for cost overruns and serious delays have proposed how to pump stimulus money back into the project," said Gerry Pollet, executive director of Heart of America Northwest, an environmental watchdog group. The companies "are set to get hundreds of millions of dollars on top of the money they've already received, for the same projects they've seriously mismanaged."

Energy Department officials, as well as the contractors, point out that nuclear cleanup work is exceedingly complex and that some problems have been unavoidable. Still, the boost in funds to a troubled federal program highlights the potential pitfalls as $787 billion in stimulus funding flows out to federal, state and local programs across the country.

In the case of the Energy Department program, private contractors do all cleanup work, and they have been involved from the beginning in shaping their piece of the stimulus. As far back as December, when it became clear that Obama would introduce a huge spending bill to create jobs, Energy Department staff members began meeting with the contractors, including representatives from Bechtel National, CH2M Hill and other large firms.

A $6.4 billion plan was devised at the sessions and carried forward by Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), who incorporated the funding into the Senate bill. The House version of the bill provided for $500 million.

But Murray pushed for the larger figure, saying in an interview that hundreds of acres would be removed from the nation's "footprint of contamination" and that the projects were a perfect fit for stimulus spending because they would create jobs -- the Energy Department has estimated 13,000.

The final version of the legislation included $6 billion for nuclear cleanup, and the department said it would negotiate with current contractors, rather than conduct a lengthy competitive bidding process, to meet spending deadlines. Most work will begin in the coming months and is supposed to be completed by the end of 2011.

It is already clear that many of the same contractors whose problems have been noted in dozens of GAO and inspector general reports are once more in line for federal money.

Washington Closure Hanford, for example, will receive $254 million for additional cleanup work at the Hanford nuclear site along the Columbia River in central Washington State. Two years ago, some workers who the company had hired were caught falsifying documents about their handling of nuclear waste, according to an investigation by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Todd Nelson, a spokesman for Washington Closure Hanford, said his company thinks the misconduct by subcontractors is now "history," adding that the current work is "ahead of schedule, under budget and by all measures getting high marks."

In New Mexico, Washington TRU Solutions will get at least $100 million to manage and operate a disposal site in the Chihuahua Desert despite safety violations that forced repeated closures and put the work behind schedule. Company officials did not return calls requesting comment. Senators have demanded that the department name contractors with past cost overruns and delays, and have questioned why it would give current contractors new work without firm penalties in place. "These contractors know they are going to get the business. What has been the penalty when they exceeded costs?" Sen. Mark Begich (D-Alaska) asked at a hearing last month. "Over the past four years, how many contracts have been terminated?"

No contractors lost jobs for poor performance during that period, said Inés Triay, acting assistant secretary for environmental management. But she said that if contractors do not perform well in the stimulus programs, the funds will be shifted to other projects. "We believe we will be very demanding customers," she said.

Environmental groups, as well as government watchdogs, have warned that private contractors have become too powerful, wielding more influence at the sites than the Energy Department. The department staff members, said Gene Aloise, the GAO's director of natural resources and environment, "need to be reminded that they are there to oversee the contractors, to protect the taxpayer's dollars."

A central concern for watchdog groups and government auditors is that, to secure the huge funding increase, department officials promised to accelerate the work, and that some of the most notable mishaps took place during accelerated plans under two prior administrations.

One project was at the Oak Ridge, Tenn., site, where costs more than doubled and the estimated completion date went from 2008 to 2015. Two plants there were abandoned in the 1960s, and hundreds of compressors and generators laced with uranium were left behind.

Bechtel Jacobs, hired to dismantle and demolish the two buildings, fell behind schedule in 2005 and asked the Energy Department to authorize an accelerated plan for the work. But, according to government records, the company

did not follow proper safety plans or accurately evaluate the first building's condition before sending in workers. That's when the worker fell through the floor and was seriously injured. "This accident did not have to happen," an investigation by the Energy Department found. "Did we have problems? Yes. But I believe that anyone would have," said Paul Divjak, president and general manager at Bechtel Jacobs, noting that the worker has recuperated and has returned to the job. "Are there other companies that are better qualified" to do the new work? "We don't think so."

At the Hanford site, critics worry that accelerated efforts will lead to a repeat of past mistakes. In 2006, for example, a treatment plant had to be redesigned largely because site managers did not account for the region's seismic activity, causing costs to rise from $4.2 billion to a projected $12.2 billion. Now, $44 million in stimulus funding will go to design a facility that will process leftover waste from the treatment plant. But because that plant is still under construction, nuclear engineers say it is premature to design the new facility. 'It doesn't make sense,' said Arjun Makhijani, president of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research and an expert on the Hanford site. 'It's like figuring out what you are going to do with spare parts from a car you are going to build before you build the car. What they design today will be obsolete by the time the plant is up and operating in 2019.'"

Echoes of Amchitka

40 Years After America's Biggest Nuclear Blast, Alaska Damage Continues

By Jeffrey St. Clair

Amchitka Island sits at the midway point on the great arc of Alaska's Aleutian Islands, less than 900 miles across the Bering Sea from the coast of Russia. Amchitka, a spongy landscape of maritime tundra, is one of the most southerly of the Aleutians. The island's relatively temperate climate has made it one of the Arctic's most valuable bird sanctuaries, a critical staging ground for more than 100 migratory species, as well as home to walruses, sea otters and sea lions. Off the coast of Amchitka is a thriving fishery of salmon, pollock, haddock and halibut. All of these values were recognized early on. In 1913, Amchitka was designated as a national wildlife refuge by President William Howard Taft. But these ecological wonders were swept aside in the early '60s when the Pentagon and the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) went on the lookout for a new place to blow up H-bombs. Thirty years ago, Amchitka was the site of three large underground nuclear tests, including the most powerful nuclear explosion ever detonated by the United States.

The aftershocks of those blasts are still being felt. Despite claims by the AEC and the Pentagon that the test sites would safely contain the radiation released by the blasts for thousands of years, independent research by Greenpeace and newly released documents from the Department of Energy (DOE) show that the Amchitka tests began to leak almost immediately. Highly radioactive elements and gasses, such as tritium, americium-241 and plutonium, poured out of the collapsed test shafts, leached into the groundwater and worked their way into ponds, creeks and the Bering Sea.

At the same time, thousands of Amchitka laborers and Aleuts living on nearby islands were put in harm's way. Dozens have died of radiation-linked cancers. The response of the federal government to these disturbing findings has been almost as troublesome as the circumstances surrounding the tests themselves: a consistent pattern of indifference, denial and cover-up continues even today.

There were several factors behind the selection of Amchitka as a test site. One most certainly was the proximity to the Soviet Union. These explosions were meant to send a message. Indeed, the tests were designed to calibrate the performance of the Spartan anti-ballistic missile, built to take out the Soviet nuclear arsenal. Publicly, however, the rationale offered by the AEC and the Defense Department was simply that Amchitka was a remote, and therefore safe, testing ground. "The site was selected and I underscore the point because of the virtually zero likelihood of any damage," claimed James Schlesinger, then chairman of the AEC.

What Schlesinger and his cohorts overlooked was the remarkable culture of the Aleuts. Amchitka may have been remote from the continental United States, but for nearly 10,000 years it had been the home of the Aleuts. Indeed, anthropologists believe the islands around Amchitka may be the oldest continuously inhabited area in North America. The Aleuts left Amchitka in the 1880s after Russian fur traders had wiped out the sea otter population, but they continued to inhabit nearby islands and relied on the waters near Amchitka for subsistence. The Aleuts raised forceful objections to the tests, pointing to the risk of radiation leaks, earthquakes and tsunamis that might overwhelm their coastal villages. These concerns were never addressed by the federal government. In fact, the Aleuts were never consulted about the possible dangers at all.

In 1965, the Long Shot test exploded an 80 kiloton bomb. The $10 million test, the first one supervised by the Pentagon and not the AEC, was really a trial run for bigger things to come. But small as it was, there were immediate problems. Despite claims by the Pentagon that the test site would not leak, radioactive tritium and krypton-85 began to seep into freshwater lakes almost instantly.

But evidence of radioactivity, collected by Defense Department scientists only three months after the test, was kept secret for five years. The bomb site continues to spill

toxins into the environment. In 1993, EPA researchers detected high levels of tritium in groundwater samples taken near the test site.

The contamination from Long Shot didn't deter the Pentagon bomb-testers. In 1969, the AEC drilled a hole 4,000 feet deep into the rock of Amchitka and set off the Milrow nuclear test. The one megaton blast was 10 times as powerful as Long Shot. The AEC called it a "calibration test" designed to see if Amchitka could withstand a much larger test. The evidence should have convinced them of their dangerous folly. The blast triggered a string of small earthquakes and several massive landslides; knocked water from ponds, rivers and lakes more than 50 feet into the air; and, according to government accounts, "turned the surrounding sea to froth."

A year later, the AEC and the Pentagon announced their plans for the Cannikin nuclear test. At five megatons, Cannikin was to be the biggest underground nuclear explosion ever conducted by the United States. The blast would be 385 times as powerful as the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Cannikin became a rallying point for native groups, anti-war and anti-nuke activists, and the nascent environmental movement. Indeed, it was opposition to Cannikin by Canadian and American greens, who tried to disrupt the test by taking boats near the island, that sparked the birth of Greenpeace.

A lawsuit was filed in federal court, charging that the test violated the Limited Test Ban Treaty and the newly enacted National Environmental Policy Act. In a 4 to 3 decision, the Supreme Court refused to halt the test. What the Court didn't know, however, was that six federal agencies, including the departments of State and Interior, and the fledgling EPA, had lodged serious objections to the Cannikin test, ranging from environmental and health concerns to legal and diplomatic problems. Nixon issued an executive order to keep the comments from being released. These documents, known as the Cannikin Papers, came to symbolize the continuing pattern of secrecy and cover-up that typified the nation's nuclear testing program. Even so, five hours after the ruling was handed down on Nov. 6, 1971, the AEC and the Pentagon pulled the switch, detonating the Cannikin bomb.

In an effort to calm growing public opposition, AEC chief Schlesinger dismissed environmental protesters and the Aleuts as doomsayers, taking his family with him to watch the test. "It's fun for the kids and my wife is delighted to get away from the house for awhile," he quipped. With the Schlesingers looking on, the Cannikin bomb, a 300-foot-long device implanted in a mile-deep hole under Cannikin Lake, exploded with the force of an earthquake registering 7.0 on the Richter scale. The shock of the blast scooped a mile-wide, 60-foot-deep subsidence crater in the ground over the test site and triggered massive rock falls. The immediate ecological damage from the blast was staggering. Nearly 1,000 sea otters, a species once hunted to near extinction, were killed their skulls crushed by the shockwaves of the explosion. Other marine mammals died when their eyes were blown out of their sockets or when their lungs ruptured.

Thousands of birds also perished, their spines snapped and their legs pushed through their bodies. (Neither the Pentagon nor the Fish and Wildlife Service has ever studied the long-term ecological consequences of the Amchitka explosions.) Most worrisome was that a large volume of water from White Alice Creek vanished after the blast. The disappearance of the creek was more than a sign of Cannikin's horrific power. It was also an indication that the project had gone terribly wrong; the blast ruptured the crust of the earth, sucking the creek into a brand new aquifer, a radioactive one.

In the months following the explosion, blood and urine samples were taken from Aleuts living in the village of Adak on a nearby island. The samples were shown to have abnormally high levels of tritium and cesium-137, both known carcinogens. Despite these alarming findings, the feds never went back to Adak to conduct follow-up medical studies. The Aleuts, who continue their seafaring lifestyle, are particularly vulnerable to radiation-contaminated fish and marine mammals, and radiation that might spread through the Bering Sea, plants and ice flows.

But the Aleuts weren't the only ones exposed to Cannikin's radioactive wrath. More than 1,500 workers, who helped build the test sites, operate the bomb tests and clean up afterward were also put at risk. The AEC never conducted medical studies on any of these laborers. When the Alaska District Council of Laborers of the AFL-CIO, began looking into the matter in the early '90s, the DOE claimed that none of the workers had been exposed to radiation. They later were forced to admit that exposure records and dosimeter badges had been lost.

In 1996, two Greenpeace researchers, Pam Miller and Norm Buske, returned to Amchitka. Buske, a physicist, collected water and plant samples from various sites on the island. Despite claims by the DOE that the radiation would be contained, the samples taken by Buske revealed the presence of plutonium and americium-241 in freshwater plants at the edge of the Bering Sea.

In other words, Cannikin continues to leak. Both of these radioactive elements are extremely toxic and have half-lives of hundreds of years.

In part because of the report issued by Miller and Buske, a new sense of urgency was lent to the claims of laborers who said they had become sick after working at the Amchitka nuclear site. In 1998, the union commissioned a study by Rosalie Bertell, a former consultant to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (which replaced the AEC). Bertell found that hundreds of Amchitka workers were exposed to ionizing radiation at

five times the level then recognized as hazardous. However, the research is complicated by the fact that many of the records from the Amchitka blast remain classified and others were simply tossed away. "The loss of worker exposure records, or the failure to keep such records, was inexcusable," Bertell says.

One of the driving forces behind the effort to seek justice for the Amchitka workers and the Aleuts is Beverley Aleck. Her husband Nick helped drill the mile-deep pit for the Cannikin test; four years later, he died of myelogenous leukemia, a type of cancer associated with radiation exposure. Aleck, an Aleut, has waged a multi-year battle with the DOE to open the records and to begin a health monitoring program for the Amchitka workers. For more than four decades promised health surveys of the Amchitka workers have languished without funding. Will the victims of the Amchitka blasts ever get justice? Don't count on it. For starters, the Aleuts and Amchitka workers are specifically excluded by the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act from receiving medical assistance, death benefits or financial compensation. There is a move to amend this legal loophole, but even that wouldn't mean the workers and Aleuts would be treated fairly. The DOE has tried repeatedly to stiff arm other cases by either dismissing the link between radiation exposure and cancer or, when that fails, invoking a "sovereignty" doctrine, which claims the agency, is immune from civil lawsuits.

Dr. Paul Seligman, former deputy assistant secretary of the DOE's Office of Health Studies, writes it off as the price of the Cold War. "These were hazardous operations," Seligman says. "The hazards were well understood, but the priorities at the time were weapons production and the defense of the nation." At a time when the mainstream press and Republican politicians are howling over lax security at nuclear weapons sites and Chinese espionage, a more dangerous betrayal of trust is the withholding of test data from the American public. China may use the Los Alamos secrets to upgrade its tiny nuclear arsenal, but the Amchitka explosions already have imperiled a thriving marine ecosystem and caused dozens of lethal cancers.

The continuing cover-up and manipulation of information by the DOE not only denies justice to the victims of Amchitka, but indicates that those living near other DOE sites may be at great risk. "DOE management of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex is of the old school in which bad news is hidden," says Pamela Miller, now executive director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics. "This conflicts with sound risk management and makes the entire system inherently risky. The overwhelming threat is of an unanticipated catastrophe."

Jeffrey St. Clair is the author of Born Under a Bad Sky is just out from AK Press / CounterPunch books.

Support Oversight and Accountability Enact Whistleblower Legislation Now

WHEREAS, recent financial scandals and multi-billion dollar bail-out legislation highlight the urgent need to protect those honest Americans who report wrongdoing in the government and in the private sector.

WHEREAS, courageous whistleblowers are responsible for recovering billions of dollars stolen by government contractors engaged in fraud.

WHEREAS, retaliation against whistleblowers targets the very people who we need to tell the truth about fraud and misconduct.

BE IT RESOLVED: That Congress MUST enact a national whistleblower protection law that provides all whistleblowers with the right to federal court proceedings, a trial by jury and reasonable damages as endorsed by President-Elect Obama.

For more information contact National Whistleblowers Center, Box 3768, Washington, DC 20027; email, lmw@whistleblowers.org

Downwinders Still Waiting for RCECA Coverage

***T**imes-News* correspondent, Blair Koch, reports 7/6/09; "A common fear among victims of radiation fallout caused by nuclear testing in Nevada during the 1950s and '60s is that they will not live long enough to see the government take accountability.

Ilene Hoisington expressed this sentiment when interviewed by the *Times-News* in June 2007. At 75, she had seen both her sons die of cancer and had her own larynx removed due to the same disease. Hoisington's sister also died of cancer.

In June 2008, Hoisington lost her battle too, having died before Idaho fallout victims were included in the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act. "I think (the government) is waiting until we all die and then there won't be anymore downwinders, problem solved," Hoisington said in 2007.

For the downwinders today who still hold that belief, a recent move by Idaho Republican Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch and Montana Democratic Sens. Jon Tester and Max Baucus, is providing glimmers of hope.

The four senators are sponsoring legislation that would make residents of the two states eligible for a federal program that compensates people who lived in affected areas, downwind of the Nevada Test Site during periods of atmospheric nuclear testing. It is the third time such legislation has been introduced.

Under the legislation, introduced June 25, those victims are compensated up to $50,000 if they contract certain

kinds of cancer and disease. Presently, fallout victims are compensated only in parts of Utah, Nevada and Arizona, although studies show Idaho and Montana received some of the highest doses of radioactive fallout. Four of the top 10 counties in the nation for fallout doses are in Idaho.

"I think there is a lot more interest in getting hearings and getting RECA expanded," said J. Truman, leader of the activist group Downwinders. Truman, of Malad, said the time is ripe for expanding RECA like other nations have including France and Russia, which compensated and continue to provide treatment to victims of their own nuclear testing programs within the same time period. "Everybody but us is doing this across the board. But here? All we have is 22 counties covered," Truman said.

Truman, 57, said he was part of a thyroid health study conducted in 1964. The study was to be the most definitive test to follow a group of youngsters over 40 years time. Truman said halfway through the test results showed the direct link to nuclear testing and thyroid cancers, among other health problems. "The government effectively pulled the plug on the study. It could have been the chance for us to effectively study what happened, so it would never happen again," he said. "It's insulting when even the Russians are doing studies and fessing up, but we can't even get studies going here.

"There is a lot of concern because these countries have signed and ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban, which tells the world 'never again.' We haven't ratified the Ban and that tells the world we are still in the mindset that these are weapons worth pursuing."

In February, Reps. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, Walt Minnick, D-Idaho, and Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah, wrote to again request the House Judiciary Committee conduct a hearing on RECA.

"Pressure is building and maybe with the different leadership in the House and Senate something will happen this year, Truman said."Justice is still needed."

Wendell resident Sarah Wolfe, 65, is hopeful but reserved about the so-called progress in Washington. Wolfe, who lived west of Buhl in her youth and during the nuclear testing, said her life has been devastated by her deteriorating health. Fifteen years ago she was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. The disease left her unable to work; the cost for surgery and ongoing treatment left her penniless, she said. "I had a nice seven-and-a-half-acre farm but couldn't keep up and was forced to sell it," Wolfe said. "Now I live in a small rented trailer house and can hardly keep up on it."

She said $50,000 "wouldn't have covered the first month of care" following her surgery. What downwinders really need, Wolfe said, is acknowledgement. "It seems like wildlife and their survival and throwing money, tax dollars, is more important than taking care of the taxpayers themselves," she said. "Wolves are more important than taking care of people effected by bomb testing done by the government, than the people. We are at the bottom of the chain.

"Maybe if senators and congressman were downwinders themselves, something would happen sooner and it would be different for the rest of us." Like Hoisington, Wolfe hopes to see the day the government acknowledges the problems caused and the people hurt by nuclear testing fallout. On June 20, her older sister lost a fight against a rare bone cancer."

Nuclear Funds Hit With Losses

Money to close TMI, Peach Bottom units down a total of $203 million.

Ad Crabel reports 6/18/09 in Lancaster Online (Pennsylvania); "The economic downturn has caused funds set aside for the safe closure of the Three Mile Island and Peach Bottom nuclear plants to drop dramatically in the last two years. Since 2007, estimates of dismantling costs at the nation's 104 nuclear plants have risen by more than $4.6 billion while the investment funds that are supposed to pay for the closures - or decommissioning as it's called - have dropped $4.4 billion, according to an investigation by the Associated Press.

According to decommissioning fund statements filed by Exelon Corp., owners of the two plants, the balance in the closure fund for Three Mile Island's Unit 1 dropped $69 million from 2007 to 2009. For Peach Bottom, decommissioning funds dropped $64 million over the last two years for Unit 2 and nearly $70 million for the Unit 3 reactor.

The fund losses are tied to investments. Is it a cause for concern? Yes, says Eric Epstein of the Harrisburg-based Three Mile Island Alert monitoring group. "It's a nuclear Ponzi scheme. The plants are grossly underfunded and taxpayers will be on the hook for billions, if not trillions, in cleanup costs. "The money put aside is a minimal amount (for cleanup), according to Epstein."The losses last year were staggering."

He said estimates the federal government uses for post-closure cleanup is highly conservative. The dangers listed by Epstein and echoed by anti-nuclear groups if decommissioning is not done promptly include groundwater and surface water contamination if there is a leak of stored nuclear fuel and the security risk from terrorists who might release or steal the highly radioactive stored used fuel. "Nobody signed up to host a radioactive waste site," says Epstein."The promise of the atom was that it would all be cleaned up."

But a U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission official said no community will be stuck with a closed, non-decommissioned nuclear plant. "The decommissioning

funds are in accounts that are protected. These are long-term decisions and it is not unusual to see fluctuations in trust funds," said Neil Sheehan.

Nuclear plant owners have to make annual contributions to the fund. But, Sheehan said, "We do live in extraordinary economic times." As a result, he said some plant owners soon will get letters asking for plans on how the owners will make up the decommission fund shortfalls they are experiencing. He said he couldn't reveal which utilities would get letters until they are sent.

Even if a utility would go bankrupt, the federal government likely would come to the aid of the company "or take necessary steps to make sure these needs are still addressed," Sheehan said. Nineteen nuclear plants have won approval from the NRC to mothball reactors for as long as 60 years after closing. That would delay decommissioning but the plant still would be drained and safely stored, Sheehan said.

Beth Archer, a spokeswoman for Exelon Nuclear, said today, "We are fully funded for our Peach Bottom and TMI decommissioning funds." When Exelon purchased TMI in 1999, one of the conditions of the sale was that it make a hefty contribution to the decommissioning fund. Thus, there may be more in the fund than required, even with a drastic decline in the total.

PPL customers have long been paying a surcharge on their electric bills that helps pay the decommissioning fund for TMI's active Unit 1 reactor. That ends at the end of 2009."

Idaho Downwinders See a Better Chance for Financial Help

Erika Bolstad reports in the *Idaho Statesman* 7/6/09 that; "Health care push could help residents of Idaho and Montana gain compensation, they say. For years, Idaho residents downwind of Cold War-era nuclear weapons testing have fought for recognition.

This year, the downwinders believe they'll finally get their opportunity, in the form of federal legislation that could make a federal compensation fund available to residents of Idaho and Montana with cancer attributable to fallout from testing in the 1950s and 1960s.

"I think it has a better chance this time than it's had for a long time," said Tona Henderson, an Emmett resident and one of the leading advocates for downwinders in Idaho. "I'm not necessarily a supporter of Barack Obama, but he's bringing up health care and health issues, and I think there are more people in Congress who already are thinking in that vein."

The legislation has the backing of Idaho's two Republican senators: Mike Crapo and Jim Risch. It also has support from Montana's two Democrats: Sens. Max Baucus and Jon Tester. Their legislation would add Idaho and Montana to the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), which gives people with certain cancers access to a federal compensation fund.

Currently, only cancer victims in 21 counties in Nevada, Utah and Arizona qualify, and only if they lived there during Nevada bomb tests between 1951 and 1962. People who have suffered any of 19 cancers covered by RECA are eligible for payments of $50,000. Since 1990, an estimated 13,000 downwinders have received $645 million.

Although Idaho isn't covered by RECA, the state includes four of the counties considered to be among those hardest hit by radiation: Blaine, Custer, Lemhi and Gem. In Gem County, Henderson has been tracking the emotional and physical toll of the fallout among residents of her own hometown, Emmett. She ticks off the list of people in her own immediate family with health problems that they believe are connected to radioactive fallout: her father's thyroid cancer, her mother's breast cancer, and an older brother's two bouts of testicular cancer, another brother's prostate cancer, her own thyroid condition.

"In the last two years, I've been writing down the names of people who lived in this county and moved away, or lived here the entire time and have cancer," she said. "So far, I'm at like 850 people. It's just sad." Henderson would like to see screening clinics made available to people who lived in the areas in question at the time of nuclear testing. That isn't currently a part of the legislation, but it's an option they could begin pursuing, Crapo said.

"If we continue to run into roadblocks, we're looking at the possibility of seeing if there's a way to get testing or significant help for these people in this situation," Crapo said. "Nevertheless, we're going to push hard and continue building support."

Crapo has introduced legislation in the Senate previously, but it has failed to receive much attention or a hearing. Some of the Idaho downwinders hope to see it have a hearing in front of the House Judiciary Committee; the bill is sponsored in the House by Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho; Rep. Walt Minnick, D-Idaho; and Rep. Jim Matheson, D-Utah.

No hearing is currently scheduled, however, and it's unclear how much time the bill's most influential Senate backer, Baucus, will have to spend on it. As the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Baucus has been focused on finding a way to pay for overhauling the nation's health care system.

"Sen. Baucus believes very strongly that this bill is the right thing to do for folks in Montana and Idaho who are suffering because of these nuclear tests," said spokesman Ty Matsdorf. "This is about making sure those folks are taken care of…and get these folks the help they need and deserve."