

Judge Allows 2nd Trident Sub Wharf at Bangor

By Arianne Peterson

In a January 8 decision, Federal Judge Ronald Leighton in Washington State sided with the Navy in dismissing a lawsuit filed in June 2012 by Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action and Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility. The lawsuit sought to halt construction of a second Trident submarine explosives handling wharf at the Naval Base Kitsap Bangor, 15 miles west of Seattle on the Hood Canal off the Puget Sound, claiming the Navy had not conducted an adequate environmental impact study (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The \$715 million project, which began construction in September 2012, would allow the 30-year-old site to handle ballistic missile loading and maintenance operations on two submarines at once, increasing maintenance access from 185 to 400 working days per year. The base is home to eight Trident submarines, each of which carries up to 24 missiles and almost 100 nuclear warheads. According to Pentagon policy three Trident subs must be on alert at all times, and Bangor's subs are usually deployed on patrol three times a year for up to 100 days at a time.

The plaintiffs' concerns include the fact that the military's own Explosives Safety Board refused to grant permission for the project, as Navy regulations require that the two wharves be at least 2,789 feet apart to avoid a chain reaction in the event of an explosion. The Navy plans place the wharves only about 300 feet apart.

The combined weight of the missile explosives in the two occupied wharves would be equal to 7.4 million pounds of TNT, but it would be in the form of rocket propellant, which is more explosive and more volatile than TNT and capable of exploding on impact. The Navy's EIS claimed that no increase in the amount of explosives at the site would result from the new wharf, a statement that would later be disproven by the release of over 115,000 pages of its own administrative records. The Navy did not include the Explosive Safety Board's comments in the initial EIS, which would have alerted the public to the danger of the second wharf's proximity to the first during the EIS comment period. Still, over 300 people spoke against the project in public hearings and in written comments on the EIS, which was released in its final form in March 2012.

Rather than follow the Explosives Safety Board's siting rules, the Navy sought a rare Secretarial Certification, an exemption that allowed it to proceed with the project as long as it agreed to take on all liability for the consequences of any accident that occurs over the life of the wharf.

Though the Navy maintains its claim that the new wharf will bring no increased danger to the public, it has invested tens of millions of dollars in removing or fortifying its own nearby buildings at the base. A Navy map of

the existing wharf shows a large danger zone around the site, should an explosion take place on just one sub. Suspiciously, the danger zone extends exactly to the edge of the Navy base, the borders of which were established before the missiles were even designed.

Ground Zero plaintiff Glen Milner remains unconvinced of the project's safety. "I think a study would find that a detonation at one wharf would cause a detonation at the second wharf," he said. "... [T]hey've doubled the amount of explosives. And they've doubled the number of times that missiles are being handled." Though there is not a significant risk of nuclear detonation in the event of an accident, Ground Zero is concerned that a missile accident could release radioactive plutonium, which could be carried on the wind to nearby population centers.

Judge Leighton ruled that the Navy was not required to release the records made public after the completion of the EIS, adding that the explosion safety information was not significant to the case. With the Judge's backing, the second wharf is scheduled to be operational by October 2016.

— *Kitsap Sun*, Jan. 15; Ground Zero press release, Jan. 9; 2014; KOMO News, Seattle, Oct. 29, 2013; *Seattle Times*, Jan. 8, 2012

A Flawed WHO Study of Iraqi Birth Defects

The long-awaited findings of a study into rates of congenital birth defects in Iraq, undertaken by the World Health Organization (WHO) and Iraq's Ministry of Health, have been internationally condemned as both compromised and unsubstantiated. On October 5 one of the world's renowned medical journals, *The Lancet*, "joined the chorus" of scientists attacking the conclusions of the recently-released report.

The Huffington Post reports that the findings contradict consistent evidence of high rates of birth defects in Iraq following the 2003 US invasion. According to its website: "Doctors across Iraq report that cancer rates, birth defects, and other environmental health problems have skyrocketed since 2003."

The study had been expected to make a link between increased incidence of congenital birth defects and areas subject to heavy fighting, but it "found" completely the opposite. The results contrasted starkly with those from previous studies.

Critics including Dr. Keith Baverstock, who led the WHO's Radiation Protection Program from 1991 to 2003, question the research methodology's reliance on household questionnaires rather than analysis of hospital records, which are typically seen as more accurate, noted the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons. Baverstock told *The Guardian* Oct. 13 that the report, "is not of scientific quality. It wouldn't pass peer review in one of the worst journals." — *JML*



A Trident missile submarine undergoes maintenance at the Naval Base Kitsap Bangor just west of Seattle, Washington.

Study: Uranium Weapons Debris Long-lived in Target Zone

By the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons

New research from the United Kingdom has found that radioactive particles left from the military's use of armor-piercing depleted uranium (DU) shells, made mostly of uranium-238, can persist in the environment for 30 years and that short-term studies cannot accurately predict the rate at which the "penetrators" corrode.

Critics have long argued that DU residues in conflict zones present a long-term risk to civilians. Not only is this due to the rate of radioactive decay from the isotopes in DU — and indeed DU gets more radioactive for thousands of years due to the in-growth of decay products — but also because of the rate at which intact or fragmentary DU penetrators corrode.

Two new studies from the UK have now shed more light on the processes that impact on DU's environmental persistence. The studies were undertaken at the UK's two DU firing ranges, Kircudbright in Scotland, where DU rounds were fired into the sea, and Eskmeals in England, where DU was fired into hard targets to examine its effectiveness against different types of armor.

The testing at Eskmeals produced considerable quantities of DU dust, some of which was found to have spread 3.7 miles from the site to the nearby village of Milom. Researchers took samples of DU particles from the site and subjected them to analysis to assess how they had changed over the 30 years since they were produced. Surprisingly, given high rainfall, the researchers found, "... the presence of primary impact particles results in the persistence of health risks associated with inhalation, should these particles be disturbed."

That is, uranium particles were found to be highly resistant to corrosion and as a result, 30 years after firing the particles would still present a breathing hazard if resuspended.

This finding fits with the results of a study around a former factory in Colonie, New York. Researchers there showed that DU particles produced between the 1960s and 1980s were still intact and present in the environment. In that case the particles had been produced through the incineration of DU, not by its use in weapons. The new study demonstrates that DU residues from munitions use are similar in composition and environmental persistence.

That these particles can survive for so long in the comparatively wet conditions of the UK and northern US suggest that particles in the arid conditions of Iraq may be even more long-lived.

Meanwhile a second study of DU fragments has again highlighted significant gaps in our ability to predict the future behavior of solid contamination. During test-firing at Kircudbright, intact or partially intact DU rounds have ended up in the sea but also on the range due to firing malfunctions. Researchers decided to study the behavior of DU in soils and the marine environment. The results showed that DU corrosion is highly complex.

While the researchers were more confident about predicting the behavior of DU in the marine environment, where chemical conditions are less variable, predicting the behavior of DU in soils was shown to be far more difficult.

The findings support the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons' (ICBUW's) view that attempts by the UK and US government to downplay health concerns based on the findings from a limited number of contaminated site assessments in the Balkans are not supported by the available science. ICBUW has long argued that the variability of conditions at different sites requires that each is individually assessed along with the risks they pose to health and the environment.

Following its assessments in the Balkans, the UN Environment Program suggested that intact or fragmentary penetrators in soils may have completely corroded in 25 years.

On Retirement

By Bonnie Urfer

No, it's not the first time I've retired, but now that I've had practice, this time it might stick.

My first experience with Nukewatch back in 1985 drew me to the vivid and energetic movement for nuclear disarmament in Madison, Wisconsin. I sat on the ground with hundreds of others on Madison's UW campus to protest and impede Army math research. I'd been to one meeting about the action where I met Sam Day and the other Nukewatch staffers, Cassandra Dixon and Bill Mutranowski. They were dedicated to working for peace using nonviolent direct action. That blockade did not end the arms race, but thousands of them across the country aided in eventually reducing the US nuclear weapons arsenal, and I became wedded to non-violent resistance.

Sam knew how to organize and it didn't take long before I found myself employed by and submerged in Nukewatch activities. Dozens of us drove thousands of miles researching and following covert H-bomb truck shipments, forming convoys and alerting the media. We crossed the country alongside secret trains carrying Navy reactor fuel rods. Sam, Sue Nelson, Linda Urfer, Jane Simonds and I, with dozens of additional volunteers, helped Nukewatch locate all of the missile silos in the US. I got to make the maps and design the book *Nuclear Heartland*. Hundreds of us converged at the missile silos, and some of us even climbed the fences. Back at home we worked on jail injustice, the nuclear weapons divestment campaign, ridding the campus of ROTC, the phase-out of nuclear power and resistance to the Air National Guard's Truax field. The Navy's Project ELF transmitter first came to my attention in 1983 when I worked at *The Progressive*. ELF became a major focus for Nukewatch for more than a decade. It's also where I racked up the most trespass tickets in my life, as well as federal charges for cutting ELF antenna poles with Michael Sprong, disrupting communication with armed Trident subs. Working at Nukewatch certainly kept my attention focused.

Without Nukewatch in my life, I never would have stood on the lid of a nuclear missile silo or known what it feels like to be handcuffed in the backseat of a squad car, or to be stopped on the highway by the FBI, or to have helicopters fly overhead while driving down the interstate, or to have machine guns pointed at me — or to see the power of nonviolence as evidenced by the fact that I'm still here.

Nukewatch granted me 28 years of travel, adventure, education, friendships, community, jail and prison, speaking venues, organizing, acting, meeting, planning, marching and the opportunity to know and work with the most amazing folks on Earth, for which I am eternally grateful.

Without Nukewatch I would never have met Barb Katt, John LaForge, the folks at Jonah House in Baltimore and the *Nuclear Resister* in Tucson, Ground Zero Center for Nonviolence in Washington, Nuclear Information & Resource Service in DC or the Snake River Alliance in Idaho, Anathoth and the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice, or the incorrigible activists of the Knoxville, Tennessee, and Kansas City areas. It's a long list of names and organizations world-wide that I've had the chance to work with and that continues to offer me hope in these dire times.

Through it all, my personal goal of nonviolence in word and action remains.

With lifelong hopes for nuclear disarmament, converting nuclear energy to renewable power and promoting peace through justice, I am compelled to keep working even as I enter retirement. I march and rally, support others working for peace, live a low-impact lifestyle, go to meetings, grow fruits and vegetables, produce art and — ok — sometimes I go to the office. Oh, who am I kidding? The truth is that I can't really retire — there's simply too much to do. But I'm no longer answering the office phone.

