

On the Bright Side

Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty Progresses

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which opened for signatures in New York on Sept. 20, 2017, is winning increasing support from nations around the world. Malta became the 84th state to sign on August 25, 2020.

Ireland, Nigeria, Niue, and Saint Kitts & Nevis ratified the treaty in August, honoring the 75th anniversaries of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The number of treaty ratifications is now 44, just six short of the 50 required for it to enter into force as international law. The progress comes in spite of the effect that Covid-19 restrictions have on campaigning for the Ban Treaty.



On July 15, the African Commission on Nuclear Energy marked the 11th anniversary of the Treaty of Pelindaba, establishing Africa as a nuclear-weapons-free zone. The commission called on all African states to ratify the TPNW, while also noting the anniversaries of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. “Bringing into force the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons would be a most fitting tribute to the victims and survivors of the atomic bombings.”

In Minnesota, a petition calling for support of the Treaty now has 23,000 signatures. Although face-to-face meetings with the state’s congressional delegation are postponed due to pandemic rules, the End War Committee of Women Against Military Madness and the Minneapolis/St. Paul chapter of Veterans for Peace have organized over 100 people who are calling the state’s US Senators monthly, urging their support of the Treaty. Please join this effort if you live in Minn., or start the ball rolling in your own state. —CM

Huge Cost Overruns May Defeat Small Reactor Prototype as Investors Flee

With projected costs leaping from a 2017 estimate of \$3.6 billion, to \$4.2 billion in Nov. 2019, and reaching \$6.1 billion last July, municipal investment in a Utah scheme to build the nation’s first so-called small modular reactors (SMRs) is starting to dry up.

To date, Logan, Utah and Lehi City have quit the project, and Bountiful, Utah’s power department says the chances are greater than 50-50 that it too will withdraw.

“[I]f we can’t bring this power in at a competitive price we just won’t build this project,” said LaVarr

Webb, a spokesperson for the Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems (UAMPS), Reuters reported. UAMPS is the Utah state agency that delivers electricity to member cities in six western states. Webb told the *Washington Examiner* he expected other members could decide to leave too.

The experimental reactor venture is being built at the Idaho National Laboratory. UAMPS is partnered with dozens of regional cities, the companies NuScale, Fluor, and Worldwide Construction, and the US Dept. of Energy. The plan is to build the first of 12 small modular reactors by 2029. Cities including Brigham City, Hyrum, Logan and Lehi joined the effort to subsidize some of the development costs for the first SMR, which is being engineered to produce 60 megawatts.

A major financial shock was the Energy Department reneging on its promise to provide \$1.4 billion for the first reactor, the *Cache Valley Daily* reported. Then in early August, the Utah Taxpayer’s Association issued a scathing report urging all the municipalities to quit the project citing cost overruns, construction delays, and “dependence on unpredictable federal subsidies.”

Edwin Lyman, the Union of Concerned Scientists’ Director of Nuclear Power Safety, told Reuters, “the only hope for the UAMPS project, or any other of these first-of-a-kind projects, is that the Department of Energy will end up financing it.” —JL

Renewables Outshine Nuclear; Reactor Futures Slammed by Investors’ S&P 500

As renewable energy sources become more cost effective, nuclear power is being seen as a losing investment. In its November 2019 report “The Energy Transition: Nuclear Dead and Alive” S&P Global Ratings stated, “Renewables are significantly cheaper and offer quicker payback on scalable investments at a time when power demand is stagnating.” Indeed, current international energy investment trends favor renewables, largely because nuclear power is not considered “clean.” Building nuclear reactors is hugely expensive due to increasing construction costs, and the complexity of meeting safety requirements imposed after Fukushima. Significantly, the S&P report even tells investors that nuclear power would not exist without “massive government support.”

S&P also advises against investing in small modular reactors (SMRs), which may eventually be permitted, but which can’t be developed without government funding. Although SMRs are considered a low initial investment, the reactors’ safety can’t be assured, high-level radioactive waste leaves the same disastrous legacy, while renewables are far less expensive and quicker to bring online. —CM

Bribery Scandals Prove Nuclear Industry Must Cheat to Beat Safe Renewables

Excerpted from Op/Ed by Tim Judson, David Kraft and Pat Marida, *Augusta Free Press*, 8 Sept. 2020

In Ohio, Republican House Speaker Larry Householder has been arrested, along with his chief of staff and three lobbyists. They were charged as co-conspirators in a [\$60 million] bribery and racketeering scheme involving the passage of a controversial nuclear bailout. In Illinois, House Speaker and state Democratic Party Chair Michael Madigan is under investigation, while the state’s largest utility company, Commonwealth Edison (ComEd, a subsidiary of Exelon) is cooperating under a deferred prosecution agreement and paying \$200 million in fines. The investigation includes ComEd’s maneuverings to attain a nuclear bailout....

Mr. Householder and his co-accused funneled dark money to statehouse candidates, all but one of whom voted for the bailout after getting into office. Then they conspired to kill a ballot measure seeking to repeal the bailout....

In Illinois, ComEd admitted that it provided \$1.3 million in payments to associates of Speaker Madigan from 2011 through 2019. ComEd admitted that the payments were to curry favor with Madigan over matters important to the utility, including the nuclear bailout....

The \$200-million slap-on-the-wrist that ComEd is paying in fines is less than one year’s worth of the \$2.4 billion bailout it secured from the Illinois legislature....

[T]he Illinois and Ohio subsidies are among the smaller ones: \$7.6 billion for Exelon in New York; up to \$3 billion for Exelon and PSEG in New Jersey; and a proposal for up \$500 million per year for Exelon and FirstEnergy in Pennsylvania ... have power companies done the same in other states, where even larger subsidies are on the table?...

Aging, uncompetitive nuclear reactors cannot keep up with the technological leaps and bounds and plummeting costs of renewable energy....

It’s time for lawmakers to repeal the nuclear bailouts and let the people of their states choose their energy future in an atmosphere free of corruption. If public opinion is any guide, they will always choose clean, renewable energy over dirty nuclear.

See full article: <https://augustafreepress.com/corruption-scandals-expose-nuclear-industry-for-what-it-is/>

Will Radioactive Fracking Wastewater Get in Your Veggies? Some States Say “Maybe”

By Elena Hight

As temperatures continue to rise across the globe, states like New Mexico and California are facing increasing strains on already stretched water supplies. Looking for new ways to meet water needs, some states have started researching other uses for the millions of gallons of wastewater generated by hydraulic fracturing.

Every year, the US oil and gas industry produces about 772 million gallons of this wastewater, which the industry calls “produced water.”

Depending on the geological formations surrounding the fracking site, some of this wastewater contains significant levels of radioactive materials and other toxic metals, including lead, uranium, and radium among others. This toxic wastewater is often pumped back into the ground via “disposal” or “injection” wells, or placed in



An unlined oil wastewater pit in Kern County, Calif. A new report by two environmental organizations documents the risks of using unlined pits for fracking wastewater disposal. Credit: Clean Water Action

the unknown chemistry of the water, lack of data about the water’s treatability, and the potential risk to public health and the environment. Even in areas where the wastewater is less radioactive, spillages have resulted in serious environmental problems, including the contamination of food and livestock in areas around the spill.

on-site evaporation or seepage pits. Some states have also started using the water in other ways: to drill more wells, to spray on icy roads, and to irrigate crops.

These other uses, along with the lack of research on the potential dangers of recycling contaminated water, have alarmed academics, environmentalists, and community members who have raised concerns over

Most recently, New Mexico’s Oil Conservation Division proposed new rules to the 2019 Produced Waters Act, that clarify the definition of produced water as well as the agency’s ability to regulate its use within the oil and gas industry. In response to the new rules, a coalition of environmental and indigenous groups wrote a letter strongly opposing the new rules, saying in part, “The Oil Conservation Division’s rules appear to set the stage for a more insidious plan to allow companies to dump their toxic waste into our environment.” Despite the opposition, the new rules were adopted, and New Mexico continues to pursue alternative uses for “produced water.” The state legislature has even given New Mexico State University a \$100 million grant to study the treatment and reuses of the wastewater, including its use in agriculture.

Ultimately—while states may seek solutions for the disposal of fracking wastewater, which poses risks to food production, the environment, and people’s health—only a just transition to alternative energy and a ban on the use of fracking can safeguard communities from harm.

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