Germany’s US Bombs in Spotlight

In Germany this year, 41 peace activists have been put on trial for protest actions at Germany’s Büchel air force base, where the US stations 20 of its B61 H-bombs.

Nuclear abolitionists Dennis DuVall, a US Veteran for Peace now living in Dresden, and Margriet Bos, a Catholic Worker from Amsterdam, go on trial Dec. 7, 2020 in Cochem, charged with trespass and damage to the base’s fence. The trials will draw wide attention because a Dutch national television crew is reporting.

Over a dozen resisters including DuVall are appealing their lower court convictions, and hope to win a judicial order condemning Germany’s “sharing” of US nuclear weapons—a policy that many contend violates binding international treaty law.

Nukewatch staffer and Quarterly editor John La-Forge, who was similarly charged last year for actions in 2018 and 2019, is scheduled for trial February 1 in Cochem.

Just before trial, Margriet said in part, “Along with North American peace activists Susan Crane, Ralph Hutchison and Andrew Lanier, I entered the nuclear military base in Büchel to hinder and frustrate the machine that produces and spreads to a third world war with thermonuclear bombs. We cut the fence and walked towards the runway to prevent the Tornadoes from flying. Tornado jet fighters practiced every weekday and expel 12,000 liters of CO2 every hour they fly, the same amount as driving a diesel car nonstop for 62.5 days.” —KL

Growing Criticism of Unlawful Rad Waste Storage Plans

By Christine Manwiller

Proposals targeting Texas and New Mexico for above-ground centralization of the nation’s high-level radioactive waste (dubbed Consolidated Interim Storage), under review by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), face broad opposition.

In 2017, Holtec International and partners proposed what they call a “temporary” dump in New Mexico for the waste reactor fuel. The companies claim that storage of this waste will only last 40 years, but the fine print allows for 80 years of “renewals.” In November 2019, Holtec was denied permission by the US House Natural Resources Committee to proceed with its plan, which Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) described as “a dangerous model of radioactive waste management.” The NRC issued to WCS or Holtec until either a permanent site is operating, or the NWPA statute is again amended.

By Leona Morgan

In 1945, the Trinity Test devastated New Mexico. Thirty-four years later at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania, the United States poured extensive resources into addressing the largest and most expensive nuclear energy disaster up to that time, March 1979. Less than four months later, the country didn’t flinch when it came to the second-largest release of radiation in the world. The United Nuclear Corporation (UNC) uranium mill, “across the slag pile from the Hanford Site’s Control Specialists (WCS) requested that the NRC “resume evaluation” of a separate proposal to store up to 40,000 tonnes of the waste, along with other radioactive waste referred to as “low-level,” in Andrews County, West Texas.

Beyond Nuclear, in Takoma Park, Maryland, notes that both the WCS and Holtec plans are proceeding unlawfully. Under the federal Nuclear Waste Policy Act (as amended), the federal government may not take title to high-level radioactive waste from commercial nuclear reactors until a permanent geologic disposal site is operating.

In a recent interview, Diné elder and matriarch Edith Hood explained the impacts from the spill and uranium sites that she and others are fighting to get cleaned up. Hood and her family are residents of the Redwater Plateau Navajo community. “We need this concept of ‘hózhó’ back…. We want this concept of ‘hózhó’ back,” she said.

Risky transport of such dangerous waste is also under attack, and 19 resolutions have been adopted by communities across Texas and New Mexico, several of which are municipal resolutions banning the transportation—Carlshad Current-Aруг, Nov. 10; Office of Governor of Texas letter, Nov. 3, 2020

Legal Fight Against Nuclear Navy Risktaking

By Christine Manwiller

A lawsuit against the nuclear navy in Washington State’s Puget Sound began June 19, 2012, over the safety and environmental impact of a second Explosive Handling Vessel (EHV) to the Bangor Trident submarine base. The $715 million wharf, 15 miles west of Seattle, is for loading and off-loading heavy nuclear-armed missiles.

The Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action and Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility brought suit against the navy’s plan for failure to consider the risks of accidental explosions at the new wharf, in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Naval officials did not even “comply with the law on explosives-siting regulations,” Ground Zero reports, and the military’s Explosive Safety Board flat out denied permission to build the second wharf “in part... because the navy would not study the risk of a chain reaction action explosion while loading two subs,” KOMO-TV newly reported. “Both full subs explode [48 missiles in all], the equivalent power is 7.44 million pounds of TNT,” the ABC News affiliate said.

Glen Milner with Ground Zero told KOMO-TV, “They’ve doubled the amount of explosives. And they’ve doubled the number of times that missiles are being handled.” The lawsuit warns of the risk of one exploding missile igniting 47 others. According to the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 85% of the weight of each missile is the highly explosive rocket fuel.

The lawsuit faced significant setbacks in 2012 when certain navy records were sealed after the navy claimed publication would place national security at risk. The records were sealed by the court and a gag order regarding their contents was imposed on the plaintiffs just a few days before a scheduled hearing where they were to be used as the basis of the peace group’s arguments.

In 2014, the NEPA lawsuit was dismissed by US District Court Judge Ronald Leighton, and the plaintiffs appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

While the Ninth Circuit Court ruled against the NEPA failure to assess risk claims, it struck down the gag order and the sealing of documents. Judge Leighton released the records and lifted the gag this past August 20. Another judge later ordered the navy to pay the two peace groups’ legal fees incurred to obtain the records and fight the gag order.


A Second Churchrock Spill in the Making?

By Leona Morgan

In 1945, the Trinity Test devastated New Mexico. Forty-four years later at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania, the United States poured extensive resources into addressing the largest and most expensive nuclear energy disaster up to that time, March 1979. Less than four months later, the country didn’t flinch when it came to the second-largest release of radiation in the world. The United Nuclear Corporation (UNC) uranium mill, “across the slag pile from the Hanford Site’s

The two nuclear submersibles in the two photos, each two football fields long? The combined total of 48 missiles on them hold rocket fuel with explosive force equal to 7.4 million pounds of TNT—their 240 nuclear warheads (5 on each missile) equal 141 million tons of TNT.

Can you spot the two submarines in the photo, each two football fields long? Could the combined total of 48 missiles on them hold rocket fuel with explosive force equal to 7.4 million pounds of TNT—their 240 nuclear warheads (5 on each missile) equal 141 million tons of TNT?

For cleanup of the mine, GE proposes to move and permanently store one million cubic yards of mine waste on top of existing mill waste, and to transport more radioactive wastes offsite, most likely to the White Mesa Mill which would impact the Ute Mountain Ute indigenous community.

The former UNC mill has been undergoing remediation and monitoring, but the offsite contamination has never been adequately addressed.

RWPR is demanding cleanup, housing, education, and a comprehensive health study. “We want the community and the government to clean up... We want this concept of ‘hózhó’ back in the community, all across the Navajo Nation,” said Hood, referring to the traditional Diné teaching about living in harmony and balance with the universe.

The proposed cleanup requires an amendment to the license for the mill issued by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). GE submitted a license amendment application in September 2018, and the NRC had no authority in Georgia by that time. On March 21, 2019, where locals expressed strong opposition to moving mine waste on top of a mountain of mill waste. The critics point out the mill waste is in the flood plain and warned of the possibility of another Churchrock Spill.

The NRC is now taking public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for this proposal until December 28 and has virtual public comment meetings set for December 2 and 9, 2020.

Since 2009, the RWPR Community Association has held an annual event around July 16 to raise awareness about uranium mining, the Churchrock Spill, and cleanup. Due to Covid-19, this year’s event was canceled but, according to Hood, next year the group plans to “carry on” and welcome “anyone who is doing something to help Mother Earth.”

—Leona Morgan works with Diné Na Nukes in New Mexico

Pilots wave from a Tornado fighter jet.

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