

NRC Conducting “Open Investigation” into Allegedly Counterfeit, Substandard US Reactor Parts, & Impossibility of Evacuating Seabrook

NUKEWATCH EXCLUSIVE
By John LaForge

Federal investigators have confirmed that they are probing allegations that counterfeit, substandard parts are currently being used in scores of nuclear reactors across the United States, and, further, that emergency responders in New Hampshire’s National Guard and the Massachusetts State Police have been gagged by orders not to reveal that it is impossible to conduct a safe evacuation of the Seabrook reactor during an emergency.

In a January 15, 2021 email to We the People — a whistle-blower protection group in Rowley, Mass. — Malion Bartley, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s Office of Inspector General’s (OIG) Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Investigations, wrote that his office “has an open investigation and is reviewing the concerns you provided and your supporting documents.” Bartley’s email, made public only recently, follows a December 14, 2020 letter in which Bartley confirmed, “The Office of the Inspector General, US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), is reviewing your allegation regarding counterfeit and substitute parts in nuclear plants around the United States.”

For over 35 years, We the People has demanded an investigation into the whistle-blower declarations that reactor manufacturers have installed counterfeit, substandard parts in reactors across the country. The allegations are based on tape recorded conversations with several nuclear industry and NRC whistle-blowers. Mr. Bartley’s December 14 letter insists that We the People provide the OIG with personal contact information for the whistle-blowers who are being protected by We the People. The industry insiders have divulged to the group’s director, Stephen Comley, the sorts and locations of the fake parts

that he says currently endanger the operations of the entire fleet of nuclear reactors in the United States.

Comley replied to the Inspector General’s office that because protection of the nuclear whistle-blowers is paramount, he needs guarantees from the NRC and OIG that no retaliation will be taken against them. We the People has refused to reveal any whistle-blower’s identity to the OIG unless the courageous informants give their permission.

The OIG’s Senior Special Agent William Johnson then wrote an email to We the People on December 17, 2020, complaining that his office was “disappointed that you are choosing not to provide said requested information unless certain conditions you insist upon are met by our office.”

The *Christian Science Monitor* reported in 1994 that the NRC had regularly retaliated against agency whistle-blowers who warned of unsafe operations. (“Whistle-Blowers on Safety Risks Betrayed by Nuclear Agency,” July 29, 1994) “NRC officials were turning over whistle-blowers’ identities to one of the nation’s largest utilities, the Tennessee Valley Authority” in violation of federal policy, the *Monitor* reported. The article noted that whistle-blowers “are a major source of vital information about safety risks at nuclear power stations” and that “the NRC is frequently charged by safety advocates with being too cozy with the multibillion-dollar nuclear industry.”

On August 26, 2021, special agent Johnson again wrote in an email to Comley that OIG’s “Report will be completed by the end of September 2021.” On Sept. 13, 2021, Johnson emailed, “Please forward to the OIG the contact information for these additional state troopers that you say you spoke with. ... They are in law enforcement, and the NRC OIG is a law

enforcement agency. We can be trusted.” After sharing his agency contact information, Johnson wrote, “I look forward to talking to these other state troopers who will confirm your allegation that no safe evacuation of Seabrook Station would be possible in an emergency.” The use of bogus equipment inside operating reactors, and a failed evacuation during a reactor accident, raise both the chances and the consequences of a disaster at reactors across the country and particularly at Seabrook, located on the New Hampshire seacoast 40 miles north of Boston.

We the People is waiting to hear whether its precautionary guarantees — ensuring the anonymity and personal security of its whistle-blowers — will be granted by the OIG.

Launched:

The National Radioactive Waste Coalition

Your group is invited to join a newly formed national organization. The National Radioactive Waste Coalition (NRWC) which was officially launched in November 2020 now has forty-one organizations from across the country. Among the members are the Nuclear Information & Resource Service, Manhattan Project for a Nuclear-Free World, Citizens Awareness Network, Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment, and Nukewatch. See our new website at radioactivewastecoalition.org. (If it isn’t running yet, check back in a few days.)

This new coalition is working to build solidarity and unity across the country among various groups working on nuclear waste issues and others that support this work. The coalition will continue to expand current actions regarding legal, legislative, and regulatory issues while also bringing new people and groups into the movement — especially front-line communities, Indigenous Peoples, younger people, and people of color.

Goals

The main focus of the coalition is to mount a strategic campaign with a multi-pronged approach to involve and mobilize organizations and individuals to achieve the following goals:

- Halt permanently the Yucca Mountain repository;
- Stop all consolidated interim storage;
- Keep high-level radioactive waste as close to its current sites as possible and “harden” the storage so it is as safe as it can be;
- Reduce the inherent dangers with storage of high-level radioactive waste at decommissioned nuclear reactors and other nuclear sites.

Principles

The National Radioactive Waste Coalition is committed to stopping the production and the reprocessing of radioactive waste. The isolation of radioactive waste is critical for protecting all living things, from the tiniest organisms in the soil and water to all the humans living on our planet. We are committed to working to ensure this isolation is accomplished. We are committed to preventing the unnecessary movement of radioactive waste.

Our goal is to build solidarity through strong collaboration and honoring the needs of local communities.

Our work is grounded in respect for all people, and we reject oppressive decisions, actions, or the creation of sacrifice zones. We commit to ending environmental racism. We will engage many diverse people in both the work of the campaign and the process to find effective approaches to isolate radioactive waste.

We will work together to hold the nuclear industry, government officials, and offices accountable for their actions, for enforcing our laws and treaties — and for keeping us all as safe as possible. We are committed to non-violence as a movement and the equitable distribution of resources to do our work together.

Help increase the strength of the coalition by becoming a working member.

Nukewatch Joins Water Protectors to Honor Treaties, Resist Pipelines

By Kelly Lundeen

In 1854 and 1855, treaties were signed between the Anishinaabe and the United States governing lands where today the Enbridge Inc. tar sands Line 3 pipeline is under construction. Article 11 of the 1854 Treaty says the Indigenous peoples “in the territory hereby ceded, shall have the right to hunt and fish.”

“My grandfather signed the 1854 Treaty,” says Anishinaabe Water Protector Sherry Couture of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. Carrying on the work of her family, she resists Line 3 as a way to honor the treaties. President Biden could do the same by cancelling Line 3 with the stroke of a pen. The US government is in clear violation of the treaties. Enbridge, a Canadian company, has a record of 1,068 spills spewing 7.4 million gallons of oil, and 28 more spills during construction of Line 3 that spilled 13,000 gallons of drilling fluid.

Since the line expansion was proposed seven years ago, there has been sustained opposition. In August, a novel lawsuit arguing for the rights of *manoomin*, or wild rice, was filed by the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, several tribal members and lead plaintiff, *manoomin* itself, against the State of Minnesota in the Tribal Court of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe. A case for the rights of nature is a new legal strategy, but not implausible considering it has already faced down its first challenge from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. At least six tribal nations and other countries like Ecuador, Bolivia, and Uganda already have the rights of nature guaranteed in their constitutions or statutes.

In addition to litigation, nonviolent direct action has led to the arrest of over 800 water protectors. In June, Nukewatch organized a local gathering to greet the Wisconsin caravan that participated in the Treaty People Gathering, a massive, nationwide mobilization. In August I joined a walk with my three children, a double stroller, bikes, and roller blades for a 30-mile portion of the 256-mile long Treaty People Walk for Water. On the walk we met Cou-



This August, Nukewatch’s Kelly Lundeen and her family spent four days walking in the Treaty People Walk for Water in Minnesota.

ture, and many other Water Protectors walking up to 20 miles a day through summer heat and wind.

What started in northern Minnesota with a few dozen walkers, swelled to a flood of 2,000 people at the state capitol on August 25.

The resistance will continue. Couture told Nukewatch that she’d been to all the hearings, including her own tribal government’s, and lived 70 percent of the last four years in camps resisting the pipelines. “I’ve been arrested 15 times,” she said. She and others are beginning a new walk against Enbridge’s Line 5 in northern Wisconsin. Water protectors say reasons for walking are still here: for the Water and to honor the treaties.

For more info., find Treaty People Walk Line 3 on Facebook, or stopline3.org.