

# On the Bright Side

## New Office in Justice Dept. to Fight Environmental Racism

Julia Kane, Grist

The Biden administration on May 5th unveiled a new government office for communities that have been targeted and plagued by polluters for decades.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) is launching its first-ever Office of Environmental Justice, which, along with other federal agencies, will bring cases against polluters, prioritizing the communities most affected by environmental harm.

U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a press conference, “Communities of color, Indigenous communities, and low-income communities often bear the brunt of the harm caused by environmental crime, pollution, and climate change.”

The new environmental justice office commits the DOJ to fighting these problems by “vigorously and transparently working to secure environmental justice ... in communication with the communities most affected by the underlying violations of federal law,” Garland said. The Office of Environmental Justice will be led by Cynthia Ferguson, an attorney in the department’s Environmental and Natural Resources Division.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan noted the return of “supplemental environmental projects” as a law enforcement mechanism the Trump administration had banned. The projects allow convicted polluters to fund local anti-pollution initiatives as part of penalties for break-

ing environmental laws. Regan said the projects were “a tool to secure tangible public health benefits for communities harmed” by illegal pollution.

Jane English, the NAACP’s environmental and climate justice program manager, welcomed the news writing: “As climate change worsens, it is imperative that our leaders produce real, tangible solutions to protect Black and frontline communities and correct existing and past harms, all while initiating direct law enforcement corrective responses to egregious harms and environmental injustices.”

### Zero-Emission Canada Possible

Canada can achieve 100% carbon-emission-free electricity production by 2035 by urgently promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency, smarter transmission, and by avoiding the cost, pollution, and delays of nuclear power, fossil gas, carbon capture, and carbon offsets. So says the David Suzuki Foundation in a new study. The report details an overhaul of Canada’s electricity sector and identifies vast potential to expand wind and solar capacity, sources cited by the International Energy Agency as “the cheapest sources of new electricity generation in history.” Energy transition pioneer Amory Lovins told the *Guardian*, “far better to deploy fast, inexpensive, and sure technologies like wind or solar than one that is slow to build, speculative, and very costly. Anything else makes climate change worse than it needs to be.” — The Energy Mix online, May 27, 2020

## U.S./German Radioactive Waste Importation on Hold

By Bob Mayberry

The U.S. and Germany have agreed to export highly radioactive waste fuel from the Jülich Research Center in Germany to the U.S. Energy Department’s Savannah River Site (SRS) in Aiken, South Carolina. Critics note that the transfer would appear to violate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and has been put on hold.

According to the watchdog group SRS Watch, the Jülicher Nuclear Waste Management Company (JEN), located near the German-Dutch border, has large quantities of radioactive graphite pebbles that fueled Germany’s now defunct gas-cooled reactors. SRS originally agreed to import and process, and ultimately dump the German waste fuel at the SRS — and perhaps elsewhere in the U.S. However, objections raised by SRS Watch, and by German colleagues opposed to the export, resulted in new agreements between the SRS and JEN to commercialize the processing of irradiated graphite fuel, which includes both low- and highly enriched uranium.

These agreements also stand in violation of the nuclear weapons non-proliferation policies under the

1970 NPT, which requires the production of risk assessments before any processing of waste fuel. Tom Clements, a director of SRS Watch who first brought the secret deal to light, reports that any shipping of Germany’s waste reactor fuel would also be illegal under German law.

The DOE has refused to prepare such assessments, claiming that the graphite fuel poses no weapons proliferation risk.

According to Reuters, Germany agreed in 2014 to pay \$10 million to the U.S. to outsource the waste fuel to SRS. But former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley threatened to fine the DOE up to \$100 million a year for the delay in cleaning up the site’s colossal Cold War radioactive waste problems.

Consequently, the U.S.-German agreement has been delayed, and the parties have shifted their focus to commercializing the processing of the waste. However, techniques for removing highly enriched uranium from this aged and highly radioactive “pebble bed” experimental fuel have still not been developed.

## U.S. Renewable Energy Output Surges Ahead of Nuclear

By Lindsay Potter

In 2021 domestic renewable energy — wind, hydroelectric, solar, biomass, and geothermal — outproduced nuclear power for the second year running, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) found. Clean sources were responsible for 795 million megawatt-hours (MWh), 21% of energy production, while nuclear totaled 778 million MWh, or 20%. *Solar Industry Mag* reported April 26, 2022, that wind, the largest producer of renewable energy in the U.S., increased output by 12% in 2021 (14% in 2020), and utility-scale solar produced 28% more in 2021 (26% in 2020). The EIA predicts an additional 10% hike in renewable production for 2022. Globally, hydro-electric together with solar, wind, geothermal, and tidal produce more than twice as much energy (24.2%) as nuclear (10.3%), according to world-nuclear.org.

The World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2021 (WNISR) found that nuclear power production fell by more than 100 terawatt-hours (TWh), the greatest drop aside from the standstill following the Fukushima disaster. Although hydro-electric steadily outproduced nuclear over the last 30 years, other renewable sources such as wind, solar, and biomass have now globally surpassed nuclear. Proof possible: for the first time this year, hydro, wind, and solar together generated more than all fossil fuels in

the European Union — though France still relies on nuclear for 71% of its energy.

Competitive clean energy casts shade on the need for nuclear, as the industry flounders to innovate expedient and economic technology. Given the minimum of 10-15 years needed to bring new Small Modular Reactors online, trials in Argentina, China, and Russia have been unimpressive. Furthermore, WNISR announced “net capacity addition” fell for nuclear to 0.4 gigawatts (GW) and rose by more than 250 GW in the renewable sector last year, leading the report to conclude “nuclear is irrelevant in today’s electricity capacity newbuild market.” The WNISR also cites cost, health effects, climate change effects, the global impact of COVID-19, and “bribery, corruption, and counterfeiting” in the nuclear industry as additional evidence that nuclear power is dying.

By 2050, the EIA predicts that wind and solar technologies will become as affordable as natural gas, as nuclear and coal continue to fall out of use. To make way for clean energy Congress must sever ties with dying industries, promote carbon fees and sunset credits, shut down pipelines and drilling leases, and halt initiatives to develop new poisoned nuclear theories or bailouts that keep dangerous reactors running past their licensed closure dates.



Lindsay Potter carrying 14-month-old Riley this past winter on the Plowshares Land Trust, home to Nukewatch.

## Nukewatch Welcomes Lindsay Potter

We are happy to welcome Lindsay Potter to the Nukewatch staff! Our part-time IT support and writer Christine Manwiller had to step back because of growing responsibilities at her full-time job. Lindsay is a writer, farmer, activist, and a full-time mother. After completing two BA’s, in Poetry and Journalism, Lindsay has spent several years farming and now dedicates her time to getting back to the land, caring for family, and participating in community grassroots organizing for social, racial, and environmental/climate justice. Most recently Lindsay focused on two projects: working in Osceola, Wisconsin to protect the groundwater and the St. Croix River from harmful frac sand mining practices at the North 40 Mine, particularly as a member of the Town Board Committee drafting a new ordinance limiting and regulating the mine; and working with Amery (WI) United, a community group dedicated to racial justice organizing, that planned monthly rallies throughout the summer of 2020 and now focuses on building awareness of racism in rural Wisconsin by hosting diverse educational speakers, working with local school boards to address discussions and curricula around race, and creating events encouraging celebration and centering of Black American culture.

## Congress Approves Two-year Extension of Radiation Exposure Compensation Act

Both the House and U.S. Senate have approved a two-year extension of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act or RECA, a federal law that compensates some of the U.S. residents who were exposed to radiation during the Cold War.

The act was implemented in 1990, but expires in July unless the extension is signed into law by President Biden. The extension is intended to provide time to craft a larger expansion of the program that could last until 2040.

The law allows one-time payouts for downwinders, uranium miners, uranium mill and transport workers who can establish that they were exposed to radiation from weapons detonations or the workplace. Congress is considering a separate bill that would broaden the geographic area covered by the act, for example adding New Mexicans to the list of downwinders, including uranium workers contaminated after 1971, and raising the compensation cap to at least \$200,000.

Many downwinders and uranium workers are Native Americans and suffer from cancers and other long-term health problems. Navajo Nation leaders are among those urging Congress to expand RECA.

— AP, May 14; KNAU, Arizona Public Radio, May 5; and *Carlsbad Current-Argus*, May 5, 2022