

Coverup, not Cleanup, at Santa Susana, California Meltdown Site

By Bob Mayberry

Eighteen miles northwest of Hollywood and thirty miles from downtown Los Angeles, high in the Simi Hills, sits a government research site where rocket fuels and nuclear reactors were developed and tested. The Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL), established in 1949 and home originally to Rocketdyne, has been the site of numerous radiation leaks, toxic chemical spills, and one partial reactor core meltdown. The soil on the entire site is toxic, but the responsible parties are doing nothing about it.

In January of this year, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) entered into “non-binding, confidential” negotiations with Boeing, the site’s current owner, which require Boeing to clean up no more than 1% of the contaminants. Under this proposed agreement, or Memo of Understanding (MOU), a panel will be chosen, by Boeing, to set the terms of the cleanup, without public input.

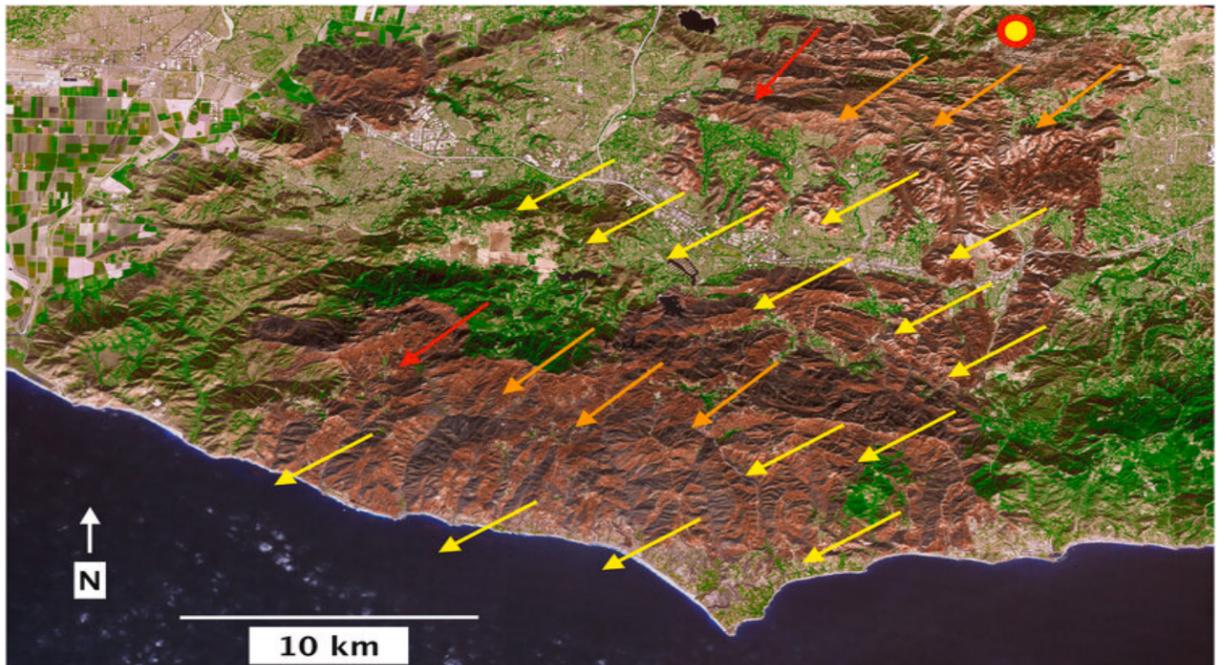
Removing the final hurdle for Boeing, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board approved the MOU at their Aug. 11 meeting in Santa Clarita. The Board ignored over 200 activists and residents who opposed it. Daniel Hirsch, retired director of the Program on Environmental and Nuclear Policy at the University of California, Santa Cruz, called the MOU “a tragedy,” adding, “it made effective the larger deal with Boeing to let them have vastly higher levels of contamination in place.” The polluter will be in charge of the cleanup.

Sordid history: meltdowns, spills, and negligence

In 1957, 1971, and 2005, fires at the SSFL caused massive radiation releases and intense radioactive saturation of the soil. In 1959, a catastrophic meltdown of the experimental Sodium Reactor released an estimated 15 to 459 times more radiation than the infamous Three Mile Island meltdown, causing radiation monitoring equipment to go “off-scale,” meaning the radioactivity in the air was too great to measure. The partial meltdown was particularly dangerous because “experimental” reactors lack the typical cement and steel containment structures associated with nuclear reactors like TMI.

For 20 years, the Department of Energy (DOE) successfully covered up the partial meltdown. However, in 1979, UCLA student Michael Rose and Hirsch, his faculty advisor, discovered internal company documentation of the meltdown. Later that year, Rocketdyne officials confirmed the accident.

In 1996, Boeing Corp. purchased Rocketdyne, thereby inheriting responsibility for cleanup of the SSFL. In 2005, Boeing paid restitution to 100 fami-



Fairewinds Associates’ analysis of soil and dust around the California Woolsey Fire found that the fire “caused radiation from the Santa Susana Field Lab to become airborne and travel as far as nine miles into surrounding communities.” *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity* published Fairewinds’ paper “Radioactive microparticles related to the Woolsey Fire in Simi Valley, CA.” Graphic by Fairewinds.

lies affected by cancer, but the Santa Susana Advisory Panel estimates up to 1,600 deaths are directly due to radiation exposure from the site.

By 2006, Boeing had violated toxic discharge permits more than eighty times, releasing chromium, dioxin, lead, mercury, and other toxins into Bell Creek, which flows into the Los Angeles River. From 1988-1995 the incidence of cancer within two miles of the SSFL was 60% greater than in the general Southern California population.

In 2007, Boeing, NASA, and the DOE all signed a consent order agreeing to a cleanup. In 2010, NASA and DOE signed additional administrative orders promising to clean up respective portions of the SSFL to standards higher than were agreed to earlier — clean to background radiation levels. However, Boeing did not sign the administrative order and it remains subject to the 2007 consent order — which it has routinely ignored for 14 years.

Boeing’s practice has been cover-up, not cleanup

On November 8, 2018, the Woolsey Fire ignited near the SSFL and burned over 80% of the site in five days. According to Dr. Robert Dodge, president of the Los Angeles branch of Physicians for Social Responsibility, the chemicals on the SSFL site are “incredibly dangerous radionuclides and toxic chemicals ... These toxic materials are in [the] SSFL’s

soil and vegetation, and when it burns and becomes airborne in smoke and ash, there is real possibility of heightened exposure for area residents.”

Just nine hours after the Woolsey Fire began, the DTSC, charged with protecting “California’s people and environment from harmful effects of toxic substances,” announced that “the fire did not present any risks other than those normally present in a wild-fire situation.”

However, three weeks after the fire was contained, independent researchers sampled soil in and around the SSFL and concluded that “site-related radioactive material ... escaped the confines” of the SSFL. The most radioactive sample was collected nine miles from the SSFL. Had the 2007 Consent Order been enforced, the site would have been cleaned by the 2017 deadline, and radiation and toxic chemical exposure would not have been among the many dangers posed by the Woolsey Fire. Instead, the continuing presence of toxic substances at the SSFL site made the fire even more dangerous. Meanwhile, government agencies ignore the need for a cleanup and bow to the wishes of a corporation like Boeing.

For updates, see Parents Against Santa Susana Field Lab: <https://parentsagainstssfl.com/>

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Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s Assassination, Pacifism, and Nuclear Capability in Japan

By Lindsay Potter

The religious cult behind the assassination of Japan’s Prime Minister (PM) Shinzo Abe has its roots in CIA anti-communist meddling and US spycraft dating back 75 years. Abe’s confessed killer, Tetsuya Yamagami, told police he shot Abe because of his ties to the Unification Church, or “Moonies,” founded in South Korea in 1954 to fight against communism. Details continue to surface of links between the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), opposition party members, and the Moonies, and of the church’s contributions to campaigns of sitting cabinet members. Clearly aligned with US foreign and military policy, the church has historical connections to the Republican Party and to former presidents Nixon, Bush I, Bush II, and Donald Trump. The LDP itself was formed by the CIA to quash left-wing movements in Japan. Abe’s grandfather and great uncle served as prime ministers, and his LDP has been in power for 63 of the last 67 years, since its inception in 1955. Deep ties between the LDP and CIA have raised suspicions due to the extreme rarity of Abe’s shooting in Japan, a country of 126 million with an average of ten gun deaths a year.

Deleting Article IX

Abe struggled but failed to repeal the constitution’s Article IX, the pacifist clause imposed by post-war US occupying forces which prohibits Japan’s use of military force in international conflicts. Follow-
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ing the July 8 assassination, voters rallied to the LDP and other “pro-amendment” (repeal) coalition parties, and for the first time they won a two-thirds parliamentary majority, the percentage required to revise the constitution. Article IX also forbids maintaining federal land, air, or sea forces, all of which Japan, with strong US support, has increasingly developed and armed in the name of “self-defense.”

Japan is deeply entangled with US and allied military operations. Since 2001, Japan has implemented new laws in the name of “counter-terrorism” militarizing Japanese Self Defense Forces (JSDF), establishing a base in Djibouti, and allowing JSDF to defend allies in combat. Japan’s navy in the Indian Ocean refueled US warplanes headed to Afghanistan and, in 2004, the JSDF deployed to Iraq for “reconstruction.”

Abe’s Nuclear Legacy

In 2002, Abe publicly claimed, like PMs before him, that Japan’s possession of nuclear weapons would not violate the constitution as long as they were for “defense.” Japan has enough plutonium and enriched uranium to develop nuclear warheads and it has ballistic missile capability. Last February, Abe promoted joining a NATO-style “nuclear sharing” pact and stationing US nuclear weapons in Japan. Both proposals would violate Japan’s three “non-nuclear principles,” limiting research, development, and utilization of nuclear reactors to peaceful uses.

The current PM Fumio Kishida hinted that a situation similar to the Russia-Ukraine conflict could break out between China and Taiwan, which US policy seems determined to provoke. As Japan prepares to release its first “national security strategy revision” since 2013, the document may publicly change Japan’s identity into a military power, potential host of American nukes, or proxy for US wars in the region.

It is hard to imagine that Japan’s population, with its historical aversion to nuclear weapons, would allow nuclear weapons in any way. But Abe brought nuclear reactors back on-line in spite of majority public opposition. Meanwhile, Kishida, who’s from Hiroshima, advocates nuclear disarmament and was the first Japanese PM to attend a Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. Still, under heavy US pressure, Japan has not signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and did not attend the treaty’s First Meeting of States Parties in Vienna, even as an observer. How will Kishida’s personal politics stand up to entrenched LDP policy and to Washington’s incendiary affronts to China, especially as Japan sits between nuclear-armed neighbors? Japan’s nuclear posture remains ambiguous: a large economy returning to nuclear power, poised for contested constitutional revision, in a precarious position as tensions escalate in the Pacific.

—*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Aug. 24; *The Guardian*, Aug. 1; and CNN, July 11, 2022.