

# Nuclear Shorts

## Holtec Push to Restart ‘Zombie’ Palisades Reactor

In January, Holtec International applied a second time for billions in taxpayer-funded federal and state bailouts to restart the Palisades nuclear reactor on the shore of Lake Michigan – source of drinking water for over 12 million people. This despite Holtec’s continued plans to illegally dump more than two million gallons of radioactive wastewater from other decommissioned reactors into the Hudson River and Cape Cod Bay. Former owner Entergy shut down the reactor eleven days ahead of schedule in May 2022 due to risks from Palisades’ crumbling infrastructure, among the world’s most embrittled. Holtec failed to explain how it will find funding, train operators, procure \$50 million in fresh nuclear fuel, obtain an operating license, or develop quality control. The NRC granted permission to destroy decades of safety documents as part of decommissioning, further complicating a possible restart. A recent letter to Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, with 115 signatories, requests the DOE deny Holtec’s bailout application, urging Palisades does not qualify. The DOE denied Holtec’s first application for a federal bailout, filed in July 2022. — Beyond Nuclear press releases, Feb. 14, Feb. 6, Jan. 23, 2023

## PG&E Seeks License Exemption at Diablo Canyon

A coalition of environmental action groups is fighting reversal of the slated closure of Diablo Canyon, California’s last two nuclear reactors. As a result of the coalition’s 2016 lawsuit against twice-bankrupted owners, Pacific Gas & Electric, the state had agreed to shut down the reactors at the end of their licensing periods in 2024 and 2025. PG&E admitted a shift to renewables could save California ratepayers \$1 billion. However, the Civil Nuclear Credit earmarked \$1.1 billion in subsidies to keep Diablo Canyon open and California promised a \$1.4 billion ‘forgivable’ loan. On March 2, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission agreed to allow the two reactors to operate beyond the end of their existing licenses, through the next five years, side-stepping the standard licensure process. California lawmakers lauded the step, although many previously supported shutting down Diablo Canyon. The NRC decision does not guarantee approval beyond 2030, but gives PG&E time to complete a 20-year license extension application.

California’s Governor and State Legislature withdrew from the closure agreement in September, claiming the twin reactors will prevent blackouts during heatwaves. Diablo Canyon produces less than 9 percent of California’s electricity, or 2.2 GW. It was running during blackouts in summer 2020, and California added 3.0 GW of solar in 2021 alone. A 2015 NRC report found the reactors could not withstand seismic shock from any of the dozens of nearby faults. Newsom’s revival plan would exempt PG&E from halting their ocean water cooling system and complying with environmental review. Necessary upgrades to Diablo Canyon could cost billions more – which draws funding and grid capacity away from renewable sources. — Reuters, Feb. 14; AP, Jan. 25; *LA Times*, Mar. 2, 2023 and Aug. 16, 2022

## Run of the Mill: Uranium Fire at Y-12

On February 23, a fire broke out in a highly enriched uranium processing building at the Y-12 nuclear weapons manufacturing facility in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The fire was contained, all 200 workers evacuated, and reports say there was no spread of radioactive contamination. Built in 1943 as part of the Manhattan Project, the risk of uranium fires is anticipated as the facility deteriorates and accumulates large stockpiles of unstable and poorly stored uranium. Lest this sound alarming, from 1997 to 2006, at least 22 fires and explosions were recorded at the site, averaging two a year and more than any other facility in the federal nuclear complex – just business as usual. — *USA Today*, WABI TV, Feb. 22, 2023; report by Robert Alvarez, Oct. 9, 2006



On Feb. 27, the U.S. Air Force fired six officers at North Dakota’s Minot Air Force Base (pictured) after their units failed a nuclear safety inspection. Minot is the only base with B52 bombers and ballistic missile silos, two legs of the nuclear triad. ICBMS are also kept at Malmstrom and Warren AFB. — *Air Force Times* Mar. 1, 2023. U.S. Air Force photo.

## Missileers Develop Cancers at Alarming Rate

At a January briefing, U.S. Lt. Col. Daniel Sebeck revealed nine former missileers who served at Malmstrom Air Force Base were diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma and one of the officers has died. MAFB, in Montana, boasts 150 of the U.S.’s 400 Minuteman III Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Silos. There are fewer than 400 missileers assigned to MAFB at a time, who sit for days inside thick-walled concrete and steel bunkers waiting for a command from the oval office to turn the launch key and initiate nuclear annihilation. Though the ages of the nine missileers were not given, their current ranks suggest they are in their 30s and 40s, compared to 67, the median age reported by the National Institutes of Health for non-Hodgkin lymphoma cases. A 2001 report from the Air Force Institute for Operational Health found 14 various cancers, two of them non-Hodgkin lymphoma, reported among former MAFB missileers. Despite the mounting evidence, the report declared the base environmentally safe and offered the observation that “sometimes illnesses tend to occur by chance alone.” Imagine that. — Associated Press, Jan. 22, 2023

## TPNW 2nd Anniversary and U.S. Still Deluded

U.S. activists rallied January 22 at over 40 actions to mark the second anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). In 2017, 122 countries voted to adopt the TPNW and now 92 countries have signed and 68 have ratified it. On the ‘banniversary,’ activists presented a letter asking President Biden to ratify the TPNW, signed by over 100 groups, citing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty’s binding agreement to eliminate nuclear arsenals, which the U.S. ignores half a century later. Activists also propped up House Resolution 77, which demands negotiated disarmament, no first-use or hair-trigger alert, and defunding nukes, though it falls short of requiring the U.S. ratify the TPNW. Both documents reiterate “deterrence” fails to prevent wars or make us safer.

The U.S. denounces the treaty and asks NATO members and allies to do the same. Yet, a 2021 survey found 65% of U.S. citizens support the TPNW and over 70 municipalities or states and several congressmembers have urged the U.S. to ratify the treaty. Still, the U.S. spends \$50 billion a year on the nuclear arsenal and maintains 5,428 nuclear weapons. The TPNW could prevent needless suffering and redirect taxpayer dollars, science, and industry away from bombs ‘never to be used’ and into housing, healthcare, education, infrastructure, and addressing climate catastrophe. The G7, all nuclear-armed states or under the U.S. nuclear umbrella, will meet in Hiroshima this May in the ultimate insult to the horrific human cost of nuclear weapons. To quote Setsuko Thurlow, a survivor of the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima: “The development of nuclear weapons signifies not a country’s elevation to greatness, but its descent to the darkest depths of depravity.” — icanw.org, preventnuclearwar.org

## International Waste Shipments Halted

International non-proliferation advocacy played a significant role in the decision to halt the shipment of radioactive waste from a German port to the notorious nuclear material refinement facility Savannah River Site in South Carolina. According to SRS Watch, German authorities confirmed “the [shipment of] spent fuel has indeed been terminated.” The approximately one million graphite pebbles, six cm in diameter, are stored in two locations in the German state of North Rhine-Westfalia. Most of the graphite pebbles contain highly enriched uranium supplied by the U.S. and used in two experimental reactors in northwest Germany which ceased operations in the 1980’s. Other radioactive isotopes

present in the pellets include tritium, potassium-95, and carbon-14. SRS researches repurposing uranium for nuclear weapons and has used the threat of weaponization as justification for accepting the contaminated fuel, lest it pass into other hands. The illegal shipment would have spread radioactive contamination. U.S. anti-nuclear groups, as well as German groups including STOP Westcastor and .ausgestrahlt, successfully protested the waste transfer alongside German politicians in the Green and Left parties. The U.S. Department of Energy failed to conduct a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement and kept the public in the dark on the proposal. — *SRS Watch* Press Release, January 2023

## DOE Conducts Radiation-Detection Flights

Not to be left out of New Year’s Eve festivities, the Department of Energy’s National Security Administration conducted its yearly radiation detection flights using twin-engine Bell 412 low-flying helicopters over the Las Vegas Strip on December 29 and 31. The flyovers, considered a normal part of “security and emergency preparedness activities,” completed surveillance in a grid pattern, at about 80 mph for two hours per area. The U.S. employs numerous Aerial Measuring Systems with pilots and specialized teams on call 24 hours per day, year round, capable of responding to radiation releases and operating out of Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada and Joint Base Andrews in Maryland. The system is in direct communication with national laboratories. AMS services the Super Bowl, political conventions, and high-profile events such as the presidential inauguration. The agency claims that within hours of radiation detection, the contaminated area is mapped and decision-making is underway for remediation. — [energy.gov/nnsa](https://energy.gov/nnsa); *Los Alamos Daily Post*, Dec. 28, 2022

## Tiny Radioactive Capsule Lost in Outback

Australian authorities searched for over two weeks to find a radioactive capsule smaller than a penny along a 1,400 km stretch of road longer than Great Britain. Radioactive detection equipment found the capsule, which contains cesium-137 and could cause skin burns, radiation sickness, and cancer. The capsule was part of a gauge that reads the density of iron ore feed. Though the tool is built for heavy working conditions, authorities claimed road vibration caused screws to shake loose and the capsule to fall en route from a mine in the outback to the coastal city of Perth. The missing minutia, 6mm by 8mm, put a large swath of Western Australia on radiation alert, though it is five times smaller than the 30mm radioactive rounds of depleted uranium ammunition the U.S. used in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and both Iraq wars, possibly on the table for use in Ukraine, which prompts no radiation alert. Not to be outdone, the U.S. to date has admitted to losing six nuclear warheads and has shown no great alarm or hurry to recover them. — *The Guardian*, Feb. 1, Jan. 28; Reuters, Jan. 31; WCTI 12, Jan. 24, 2023

— *Shorts compiled by Nukewatch staff, Bonnie Urfer, and Matthew Jahnke*