

Nuclear Shorts

To solve the climate problem, we are short of two things: time and money. Nuclear is really bad on both counts. — Arjun Makhijani

New Mexico Bans & NRC Approves Radioactive Waste Facility

New Mexico continues the fight to avoid becoming the nation's radioactive dumping ground. The legislature recently passed a bill prohibiting the construction of an interim or permanent waste site without the state's consent. Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham signed it into law March 17, the moment it hit her desk, and it officially went into effect June 15. Under the statute, the federal government must have a plan for permanent disposal, and the state must approve a proposed facility before any interim waste facilities break ground. Meanwhile, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has notified Holtec International of its approval of the firm's plan to build a consolidated interim storage facility (CISF) for 8,680 metric tons of high-level radioactive waste in New Mexico. While a wide range of groups, tribes and lawmakers continue working against the project, others are strongly in support of it. Some elected officials in the New Mexico counties where the Holtec CISF would reside, formed the Eddy-Lea Energy Alliance and continue to boost the project, as demonstrated in a recent letter to President Biden. — *NM Political Report & Beyond Nuclear*, May 11; *Carlsbad Current-Argus*, March 22, 2023

Empty Rad Waste Train Derails in Vermont

A recent train derailment once again highlights the risk of transporting radioactive waste. On February 29, a train headed to collect rad waste from the now-decommissioned Vermont Yankee nuclear reactor in Vernon, Vermont derailed. A spokesperson for NorthStar Group Services, the company responsible for the transfer of the material told the *Battleboro Reformer*, "The train was not carrying any NorthStar material at the time of the derailment, no one was injured, no property was damaged as a result, and the derailed train cars remained upright." The Vermont Yankee reactor has been in the decommissioning process since 2019 and has since been transporting highly radioactive waste fuel rods thousands of miles, via NorthStar, to the Andrews County, Texas, Waste Control Specialists dumpsite, the presumptive destination of the recently derailed empty train cars. This incident comes only a few weeks after a train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio that caused the release of several hazardous materials, a two-day fire, and evacuation of the local community. One can only speculate how a similar derailment of train cars carrying the waste would unfold. — *Beyond Nuclear*, March 2; *Battleboro Reformer*, March 1, 2023

Los Alamos Radioactive Breaches

The U.S. Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board has reported five "glove box breaches" at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) between March and April 2023, which exposed personnel to hazardous radioactivity. The glove boxes are sealed compartments that allow workers to handle plutonium by placing their hands into lead-lined gloves built into the boxes. Breaches happen often at LANL. There were three recorded over the course of one month last year. Though the April report denies resulting contamination, a January 2022 event caused air contamination double the "yearly limit" permitted in the work space and exposed four workers, one of whom required chelation treatment to remove heavy metals from the body. The following month, a worker's face was contaminated by a release from a damaged glove. In 2021, a breached glove box contaminated three workers, and a plutonium container cooling vat spilled 1,800 gallons of radioactive water. In a second vat overflow, water ran through an air vent and into a glove box on a lower floor. In June 2020, one glove box leak contaminated 14 workers.

LANL's contractor, Triad National Security, was not fined for the violations and no corrective actions have been required before a planned increase in plutonium "pit" production is to begin, which will require greater use of the glove boxes. The public will not have a chance for direct comment on new pit production during LANL's environmental analysis, according to Jay Coghlan, executive director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico. Greg Mello, of Los Alamos Study Group, reports the National Nuclear Security Administration is pushing Triad to be safe while ramping up production to 30 pits a year for warheads, saying, "It's difficult to do both." — *Santa Fe New Mexican*, June 2 & May 17, 2023

War Resisters Interrupt Construction Work at Büchel Airbase, Germany

On May 8, the anniversary of the surrender of Nazi Germany in 1945, eight war resisters entered the NATO airbase Büchel, south of Cologne, where the United States stations up to 20 of its thermonuclear gravity bombs. Trespass charges could result. The eight said they intended to interfere with construction work being done on the base's runway in preparation for the delivery of new H-bombs from the United States. Sometime next year, new "B61-12" thermonuclear weapons are scheduled to replace the B61s currently stationed on the base. The participants, aged between 43 and 75 and from all over Germany, demanded an end to Büchel's nuclear attack readiness (made explicit in NATO's June 2022 "Strategic Concept"), which they point out violates the UN Charter and other international treaties. "Germany's 'nuclear sharing' violates the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and the human right to life," said Miriam Menzel-Krämer, 58, from Aalen. "The risk of a nuclear war is already extremely high. Nuclear armament further aggravates the tensions in connection with the war in Ukraine and fuels the nuclear arms race in Europe," said Gerd Büntzly, 73, a musician from Herford. — *Büchel is Everywhere: Nuclear Weapons-Free Now!*, May 8, 2023



From left: Inga Blum, Ernst-Ludwig Iseknius, Ria Makein, Johannes Willbold, Gerd Büntzly, Miriam Menzel-Krämer, Lies Welker, and Christiane Danowski, near their "go-in" action Germany's at Büchel airbase. The banner reads "8 May - Nonviolence Against Nuclear Weapons." There are U.S. H-bombs on base.

Rad Waste Dump Decisions: Consent or Bribery?

On June 9, the U.S. Department of Energy named 13 consortia, each to receive \$2 million in federal taxpayer funding, to help push the DOE's so-called "consent-based siting" of a consolidated interim storage facility (CISF) for highly radioactive waste. The funding will be directed to "groups of university, nonprofit, and private-sector partners" who will help communities decide that they want to be the recipients of the country's waste reactor fuel. Having abjectly failed to find any safe, long-term radioactive waste management "solution" — possibly because there is none — while also failing to halt the production of radioactive waste, the DOE has now moved to what it calls "consent-based siting." Ironically, Holtec is the "lead" of one

"project team" funded by the DOE, even though the company is trying to force a private CISF on New Mexico, despite a clear lack of consent from the state. Given the three tribal affiliated groups, and three Indigenous Nations, being funded as consortia members, it appears the DOE will target Native American communities once again, as it did in the late 1980s and early 1990s. If past examples are any indicator, the "consenting" communities are likely to be those most deprived of resources, especially Indigenous communities and communities of color, who may feel pressured to accept the DOE largesse along with the deadly hazards of living alongside high-level radioactive waste. — *Beyond Nuclear*, June 11, 2023

Poison Power Means Dirty Politics

In a testament to the astronomical costs of new nuclear reactors, executives and public officials faced criminal charges recently in two conspiracy schemes that funneled billions of taxpayer dollars to failed or failing reactor projects. Stephen Byrne, former executive vice president of SCANA Corp., the utility behind the abandoned V.C. Summer expansion, will serve 15 months in prison for defrauding taxpayers, while former CEO Kevin Marsh was sentenced to two years. The SCANA plan to add two Westinghouse reactors cost more than \$9 billion and never generated a single watt. Two Westinghouse executives, Carl Churchman and Jeff Benjamin, are facing prison. Churchman pleaded guilty to perjury, and Benjamin will stand trial in October for 16 felony charges carrying a maximum of 20 years and a \$5 million fine. Meanwhile in Ohio, former Republican House Speaker Larry Householder and former Republican Party Chair Mathew Borges were convicted in March for accepting \$60 million in bribes to push HB 6, a billion-dollar bailout for two reactors operated by First Energy Corp. The two intend to appeal. First Energy agreed to pay a \$230 million fine as a settlement for conspiring to bribe the public officials. Householder's campaign strategist, Jeffrey Longstreth, and lobbyist Juan Cespedes, also pleaded guilty in the racketeering conspiracy. Ohio's Attorney General Dave Yost continues civil proceedings against First Energy. — *AP*, March 8, 2023; *Reuters*, Aug. 20, 2021; *Bloomberg News*, July 23, 2020

Ukraine: Cooling Pond at Reactor Site at Risk

The cooling pond at the six-reactor Zaporizhzhia nuclear power complex in Ukraine is in danger of collapse as a result of the destruction of the Kakhovka dam and the draining of its reservoir, according to the French Institute for Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety (IRSN). Without the reservoir on the other side to counteract it, the internal pressure of the water in the waste fuel cooling pool could break the dyke around it, the IRSN said in a June 7 report. Officials at Ukraine's Energoatom corporation, replied that any collapse of the dike would be partial "even in a worst-case," and that there would still be sufficient water to keep the six

reactor cores and the waste fuel cool. Since the collapse of the Kakhovka dam on June 6, its reservoir has been draining into the Dnipro River, has lost over three-quarters of its volume of water, and was expected to drop below the water intakes used to pump water into ponds used to cool the reactors, the waste fuel rods, and the diesel generators at the site. The Zaporizhzhia reactors have been shut down for the past eight months, but fuel inside reactors and in the cooling ponds still requires cooling. — *Reuters*, June 12; *The Guardian*, June 8, 2023

— *Shorts compiled by Nukewatch staff, Matthew Jahnke, Beyond Nuclear, and Adrian Monty.*