

Nuclear Shorts

Cesium in Scrap Metal Sets off Alarms in Chicago, Shipment Returned to West Virginia

On August 22, Steel of West Virginia, Inc., located in Huntington, notified the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) that seven days earlier the facility had “potentially melted a cesium-137 source during their melting process before shipping scrap metal to another facility in Chicago,” according to an NRC event notification of August 29. The state of West Virginia detected radiation levels of Cs-137 in the atmosphere of the facility’s bag house. The state of Illinois also alerted the NRC, as the radioactive dust on the shipment from the steel mill set off an alarm when it arrived in Chicago. The NRC reported that it did not know where the cesium came from. Despite the highly toxic dust on the shipment, plans are to return the material to West Virginia, traveling nearly 450 miles on public roads. — Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Event No. 57283, Aug. 29, 2024

Suicide Leading Cause of Death Among U.S. Army Personnel

Three decades of failed forever wars may be the cause of suicide among U.S. military personnel, but the Pentagon can’t admit it. “A recent study found suicide to be the leading cause of death among active-duty U.S. Army personnel, far greater than combat fatalities. From 2014 to 2019, of 2,530 soldiers who died, 35% took their own lives, while only 96 died in combat. The suicide rate among veterans is estimated to be 57% greater than non-veterans, according to the medical journal *JAMA Neurology*. An unpublished internal study from 2017 by the U.S. Special Operations Command advised a need for a comprehensive system to monitor the demographics and characteristics of Special Operations Force (SOF) members who have taken their life by suicide. Among veterans, SOF members specifically have an increased risk of suicide which has been linked to their increased likelihood of incurring traumatic brain injuries. SOF members have suicide rates 56% higher than other veterans and three times higher than the civilian population. Millions of dollars have been spent by the Pentagon to investigate this sad reality, although it does not appear much progress has been made. The Navy mandated that suicide-prevention hotline numbers be included on the homepages of every Navy website. But an internal audit in 2022 revealed that 62% of the homepages did not comply with the mandate. Much military suicide-prevention training has been likened to “checking the box.” Official explanations of high suicide rates among military members cite “military culture,” access to firearms, excessive head and brain trauma, and the protracted length of the so-called War on Terror. — *LA Progressive*, July 25; Boston University, July 15, 2024

‘Call to Youth: Reject Militarism and War’

By Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate, on International Peace Day, Sept. 21, 2024

I would like to thank the youth of the world for all they do to reject violence, militarism, and war. I have been inspired wherever I have traveled by the imagination, courage, and resistance of so many young people. They give me great hope for the future of humanity.

The young are wise. They know that yet again in our world we, the people, are being propagandized for war. Government leaders, and mainstream media, are telling us we must have enemies (Russia, Iran, North Korea, China, etc.) and prepare for increased military budgets in spite of the fact a growing number of countries have food banks and charity shops to try to ease the high cost of living and allow increasing numbers of families to feed their children, and the elderly to heat their homes.

Young people are protesting such policies and are going to prison to say ‘no’ to killing other humans and destroying (or stealing) their resources and land. Government leaders are going one way to militarism and war, and young people are going another, asking for a humane way of living together, respecting the environment, and peacefully solving the huge problems we all face.

‘Be gentle,’ ‘Stay human’ appear on colorful placards in multiple peace movements from North Korea to North America, Beijing to Belfast, Tehran to Tokyo, and Moscow to Palestine. People, particularly the youth, are building an alternative to the cruelty of war — often doing so from inside prisons, from their own websites on alternative media, on the streets in civil disobedience to bad laws — an alternative way of human living, a gentle more humane humanity and being, in keeping with nature. There is a new consciousness, including science, and this will not be silenced or intimidated by those playing power politics with our children’s lives and future.

Young people know what it is to suffer. They know the cost of austerity cuts, pandemics, forever wars, and they all take a toll on their mental health and sense of despair and hopelessness. We, the elders owe it to them to join in their brave efforts to change the world, to make things better for all the children everywhere. Let us therefore join our youth as they work for disarmament and peace, and refuse to hurt or kill other people and hurt or kill children. We could join them by demanding an immediate end to the Russian/Ukraine war, an end to the Gaza genocide by Israel, and use of dialogue not death — and say ‘No’ to NATO’s preparation for a third world war



Tennessee Valley Authority Chief Nuclear Officer Joe Grimes tips his hat at the Watts Bar Reactor Facility where increased production of tritium gas for nuclear warheads was recently approved. Photo: timesfreepress.com.

NRC Approves Increased Civilian Production of Tritium Gas for Nuclear Warheads

The NRC has approved the license amendment request of the Tennessee Valley Authority to increase the maximum number of “tritium producing burnable absorber rods” (TPBARs) to be irradiated in each of the two commercial Watts Bar reactors. The plan will increase production of TPBARs “per operating cycle” from 1,792 to 2,496. The increased tritium production means: 1) tritium leakage into the reactors’ cooling systems and discharge into the environment, including the Tennessee River, will increase; 2) production of fresh TPBARs at the dual use commercial-military Westinghouse fuel factory in Columbia, South Carolina will increase; 3) processing of irradiated TPBARs at the Savannah River Site will increase significantly, along with more onsite radioactive waste disposal; 4) SRS will be able to fill more reservoirs with a full tritium charge, to give the warheads maximum explosive capability; and 5) the government will continue to violate international non-proliferation norms by producing nuclear weapon materials in civilian nuclear power reactors. For more see the Nov. 2021 report, “Crossing the Line: South Carolina Nuclear Weapons Secrets Exposed.” — Tom Clements, Savannah River Site Watch, Apr. 23, 2024.

Closed Palisades Reactor in Michigan Could Reopen in 2025 Despite Concerns

In an unprecedented move, the Palisades nuclear reactor, located in Covert Township, Mich., is slated to reopen despite being closed since 2022. Previously owned by Entergy Corp., the reactor generated electricity for over fifty years. Sold to Holtec International in June 2022, the reactor has secured almost two billion dollars in funding in their reopening effort, including \$300 million in state funding and a \$1.5 billion loan from the U.S. Department of Energy. There are concerns, however, that the reactor is unsafe for reopening. Alan Blind, a former engineering director at Palisades from 2006-2013,

suggested the reactor was allowed to fall short of modern safety standards by the NRC as it was nearing retirement. Blind warned that certain important issues will not be addressed prior to reopening, including unsafe insulation on cooling pipes and inadequate protection from fires and earthquakes. Both Holtec and the NRC claim that proper safety measures will be undertaken to ensure secure reopening. An NRC spokesperson insisted that it will investigate concerns raised by Blind while Holtec claims Palisades will undergo “extensive inspections, testing, maintenance, system, and equipment upgrades.” Palisades would be the first U.S. reactor to reopen after beginning decommissioning. — Reuters, Aug. 2; Bridge Michigan, Jan. 31, 2024

Climate Chaos Could Unleash Buried Rad Waste

The U.S. Government Accountability Office reported earlier this year that radioactive contamination in the Marshall Islands, Greenland, and Spain could be disturbed or unearthed as a result of climate change. In the Marshall Islands, where the U.S. tested 67 nuclear weapons, rising sea levels may flood the Runit Dome, where U.S. troops buried 3.1 million cubic feet of radioactive material in a crater left by one of 11 bomb tests done on the island, covering it with a cement lid. Congress ordered a remediation plan for the cracking cement dome — now threatened by rising sea levels — which was never produced. In Greenland, radioactive, chemical, and human waste, including polychlorinated biphenyls, were buried in the ice at Camp Century U.S. military base. The camp itself was a series of 21 tunnels carved into the ice and was powered by a nuclear reactor. As Arctic ice sheets melt, this contamination could enter the oceans, the water cycle, and the food chain. — ZME Science, July 16; Grist, Feb. 26, 2024

Solar Power Leaving Nuclear in the Dust

Nuclear power makes up an ever-shrinking portion of global power generation, despite claims from COP 28 and corporate and tech giants pushing a nuclear “renaissance” as the “energy wave of the future.” In contrast, in its June 22 solar special issue, *The Economist* reported that solar power is on track to outpace all other sources of electricity globally in the next decade. According to a July article in *The Conversation*, “installed solar capacity is doubling every three years, meaning it has grown tenfold in the past ten years,” and, “the next tenfold increase will be the equivalent of multiplying the world’s entire fleet of nuclear reactors by eight, in less time than it usually takes to build one of them.”

Twenty years ago, it took a year to install a single gigawatt of solar capacity, and this year, it is predicted that global solar capacity will expand by one gigawatt a day. One of the biggest challenges facing solar is battery production, which requires critical minerals lithium, nickel, and cobalt. These minerals are environmentally harmful to mine and sourcing is often rife with human rights abuses and unjust economic boon for countries where this mining takes place. But the efficiency of batteries has increased dramatically in the last thirty years, and with improvements to the technology it becomes more practical to implement storage for solar energy. According to the International Energy Agency, global renewable energy capacity will need to triple in the next five years to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. — *The Conversation*, July 4; *The Economist*, June 22, 2024

— *Shorts compiled and edited by Matt Jahnke and Nukewatch Staff*

