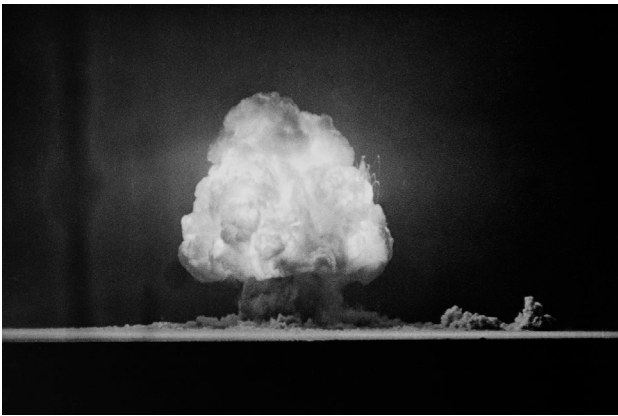


# Editorial: Trinity Test’s Gamble With Omnicide Lives On



The first atomic bomb test, 80 years ago, may have ignited the Earth’s atmosphere.

By John LaForge

The U.S. scientists who tested the first atomic bomb in New Mexico on July 16, 1945, took the immeasurable risk of converting the atmosphere into fire and burning to death all biological life on Earth and in the Seven Seas.

Although they strenuously tried, the Manhattan Project scientists were unable to rule out the risk of causing human extinction, and they lit their match anyway. How can such an action be excused? How can such spectacular hubris and arrogance be reconciled with self-conscious human decency?

I don’t believe it can. The immeasurable barbarity of putting all living beings in the world at risk eclipses the power of language to even describe it. Ruthless megalomania? Depraved nihilism? Coldblooded criminal insanity?

When Robert Oppenheimer, the civilian head of the program, informed his boss, the Nobel Prize winning physicist Arthur Compton, about the risk, the whole

program could have been halted. Compton later wrote in his memoir, “Was there really any chance that an atomic bomb would trigger the explosion of the nitrogen in the atmosphere or of the hydrogen in the ocean? Better to accept the slavery of the Nazis than to run a chance of drawing the final curtain on mankind!”

Compton reportedly decided that “Unless they came up with a firm and reliable conclusion that our atomic bombs could not explode the air or the sea, those bombs must never be made.” (*The Precipice* by Toby Ord, New York 2020, p.91) General Leslie Groves, the military officer in charge of the bomb project, agreed, but when the great theoretical physicist Hans Bethe concluded that the danger was “a remote possibility,” Compton and Groves allowed the project to proceed, trusting that further calculations would rule out global extinction.

Ultimately, Oppenheimer’s secretly commissioned study of the question could not prove the risk was zero. According to Daniel Ellsberg in *The Doomsday Machine* (Bloomsbury 2017, p.289), before the test, Gen. Groves drafted a “news release in case the explosion was larger than expected and destroyed Oppenheimer and the other observers.”

Italian physicist Enrico Fermi worked furiously on computations that found atmospheric ignition unlikely, but he “worried whether there were undiscovered phenomena that, under the novel conditions of extreme heat, might lead to unexpected disaster,” according to Ord’s *The Precipice*. The day of the blast, Fermi reportedly put the chances of atmospheric ignition at “about ten percent.”

James Conant, President of Harvard University, observed the test in person and thought the flash was much longer and brighter than expected. He wrote in his private notes: “My instantaneous reaction was that something had gone wrong and that the thermal nuclear transformation of the atmosphere, once discussed as a possibility and jokingly referred to a few minutes earlier, had actually occurred.” Yes. Multiple personal accounts of the test report that

Fermi had offered to “make book” at fixed odds on whether: 1) the test would incinerate New Mexico, and 2) the test would ignite the whole world.

That the test was conducted in spite of its potential to cause omnicide has characterized and informed the nuclear weapons complex ever since.

The extreme secrecy that protected “the gadget” has been maintained to this day. Nuclear attack schemes are only leaked to the public when disguised in the tired but reliable Cold War euphemisms like “deterrence,” “flexible response,” or “Single Integrated Operational Plan.”

Official lying concealed in 1945 and still sanitizes today the catastrophic realities of nuclear explosions, or buries them under mountains of verbiage about “low-yield” H-bombs or “theater weapons,” that are “designed to limit collateral damage.” Truman’s August 6 public statement dared to claim that Hiroshima was “a military base,” chosen in order “to avoid the killing of civilians.” (*The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb*, Gar Alperovitz, New York 1995, p.521)

Care or concern for the victims of nuclear attacks has never curtailed or even limited the development of a nuclear warhead. How else explain submarine missile warheads with 31 times the force of the Hiroshima bomb, or the neutron bomb designed to kill living things but leave inanimate objects intact? If concern for targeted peoples existed inside the nuclear weapons complex, the Bomb would already have been abolished, because it is well known that nuclear attacks can only produce deliberate massacres caused by the uncontrollable, indiscriminate mass destruction of shattering overpressure, hurricane force winds, immense firestorms, agonizing radiation burns and poisoning, and eventual radiation-induced diseases. To see for yourself, watch Greg Mitchell’s short film “Atomic Cover-up” via PBS.org.

Don’t be fooled this August when the old canard is trotted out for the 80th time about how U.S. atomic bombings of cities “saved lives.” No bombing ever did that.

## Radioactive releases at Monticello reactor — continued from page 1

**(MPCA) for exceeding radioactive water storage limits.** Xcel was storing more than 400,000 gallons of tritium-contaminated groundwater above a legal limit in temporary tanks without a permit. (*MPCA, Dec. 14, 2023, <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/news-and-stories/xcel-energy-inc-fined-14000-related-to-tritiated-water-storage-at-monticello-nuclear-facility>*)

• **On May 26, 2023, Xcel reported a spill of 300-600 gallons of contaminated groundwater, with tritium activity of 194,000 picocuries per-liter, that overflowed from a holding tank onto the ground near the well from which it was pumped.** Extensive pumping of groundwater is attempting to recover some of the tritium (radioactive hydrogen) and other radioactive materials released in the major cooling water leak of 2022-2023. (*NRC Event Reports for 05/24/2023 - 05/25/2023, Power Reactor Event Number 56535; and NRC [document] 2023-TN9610; Xcel 2023-TN9609*)

• **Beginning sometime in late 2022 or earlier, one or two 50-year-old corroded underground pipes leaked an estimated 829,000 gallons of highly radioactive cooling water — with tritium activity over 5-million picocuries per-liter — into the ground, and the plume of tritiated groundwater reached the Mississippi River by spring 2023.** [See below] (*NRC, “Environmental Impact Statement Regarding Subsequent License Renewal for Monticello, Draft Report for Comment, April 2024, p.3-47 <https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML2410/ML24102A276.pdf>*)

• **In July 2015, Federal investigators accused Xcel of willfully violating inspecting procedures and falsifying their reports about safety-related welding tests of radioactive waste casks.** (*“Feds allege Xcel contractors falsified weld tests at Monticello nuclear plant,” Minneapolis Star-Tribune, July 28, 2015*)

• **In 2009, workers found tritium-contaminated water leaking from an electrical conduit inside the reactor building basement.** Xcel later said the leak had contaminated groundwater in concentrations above the 20,000 PiC/L drinking water maximum. (*St. Paul Pioneer Press, Sept. 12 and 18, 2009*)

• **On September 11, 2008, a cable fault tripped the transformer which supplied power to the site. This resulted in a loss of off-site power and the plant automatically shut down.** After the shut-down, the reactor suffered other equipment problems with safety-related systems. (*“NRC Begins*

*Special Inspection at Monticello,” NRC press release, Sept. 19, 2008*)

• **In January 2007, a 35,000-pound control box broke from its steel I-beam mount, fell onto a large steam pipe, and caused an unplanned, indefinite reactor shutdown.** The mechanisms inside the control box malfunctioned and opened valves in four other steam pipes, said Jan Strasma of the NRC. The crash caused a loss of main steam line pressure prompting the reactor “scram.” The failure of welding holding the 13-ton box was likely caused by embrittlement and stress fatigue from 36 years of machine vibrations. (*“A massive control box broke loose, triggering an indefinite shutdown,” Minneapolis Star-Tribune, Jan. 17, 2007*)

• **On May 5, 1982, about 1,300 gallons of radioactive water leaked from the reactor into the Mississippi River in an accident that was said to be “no threat” to the public.** (*“A-water released by NSP,” Minneapolis Star, Dec. 29, 1971, p.29; “Reactor leak ‘no threat,’” Montreal Gazette, May 5, 1982, p. H15*)

• **On December 20, 1971, Xcel (then Northern States Power or NSP) intentionally dumped an estimated 8,500 gallons of cesium-137-contaminated wastewater into the Mississippi River “to conduct maintenance.”** The city of Minneapolis temporarily shut off its drinking water intake from the Mississippi because of this release. (*“Radioactive discharge fits state standards,” Minneapolis Star, Dec. 21, 1971, p.16*)

• **In November 1971, NSP discharged “about 50,000 gallons of low-level radioactive water from the Monticello [reactor] into the Mississippi to permit the repair of a loose baffle.”** (*“NSP to delay atom discharges,” The Minneapolis Star, Wed., November 24, 1971, p.23.*)

## Xcel still lying about 829,000-gallon cooling water leak, & threat to drinking water

On Xcel’s Monticello reactor website pages regarding recovery of groundwater contaminated by its massive leak, under the heading “Current status and background,” Xcel still falsely states: “Tritium has not been detected in drinking water, or in the [Mississippi] river despite increased sampling by

the company and state regulators.”[3]

Xcel is doubly false here: First, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission reported that Monticello’s leaked tritium had been detected in the Mississippi River, as of March 2023; and, secondly, the great river is drinking water for up to 20 million people.

The NRC’s Environmental Project Management Branch 1 Chief Stephen Koenick, at a public hearing in Monticello, Minn. May 15, 2024, said in part: “[A]s you have looked in our Draft Environmental Impact Statement [DEIS], we do conclude there were some very low concentrations of tritium in the Mississippi River.”

The DEIS says: “Tritium detections in wells near the Mississippi Riverbank ... in 2023 indicate tritium-impacted groundwater likely discharged to the river. Minor levels ... of tritium were measured in river samples in March and April 2023.”[4]

The same Xcel web page even makes this ludicrously self-incriminating claim: “The radiation levels in the leaked water are so low that, even if it were to enter a drinking water source, a person could drink it and it would be as safe as the food they eat on an average day.”

Xcel’s massive leak contained 5,020,000 picocuries of tritium per-liter (measured Nov. 2022), while the U.S. EPA’s Safe Drinking Water Act limit is 20,000 picocuries per-liter. — *Nukewatch Fact Sheet*

### Notes

- [1] Xcel Energy, “2023 Annual Radioactive Effluent Release Report,” Dec. 18, 2023, <https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML2413/ML24135A191.pdf>; *The Guardian*, “Radioactive material and pesticides among new contaminants found in U.S. tap water,” Nov. 3, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/03/us-tap-water-contaminants-discovery-radioactive-material-pesticides>
- [2] The reactor pressure vessel contains the uranium fuel rods, reactor cooling water, the reactor core, and fittings to direct cooling water circulation.
- [3] XcelEnergy.com, accessed May 2, 2025, <https://mn.my.xcelenergy.com/s/outage-safety/public-safety/monticello-groundwater>
- [4] NRC, “Environmental Impact Statement Regarding Subsequent License Renewal for Monticello, Draft Report for Comment, April 2024, p.3-47 <https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML2410/ML24102A276.pdf>