Mississippi River Coalition Commemorates 15 Years Since Fukushima Reactor Meltdowns

On Wed., March 11, the Coalition for a Nuclear-Free Mississippi River commemorated the 15th anniversary of the triple reactor meltdowns in Fukushima, Japan by hosting a "No More Fukushimas! Close the Monticello Nuclear Reactor" rally on the walkway of the large Lake Street Bridge over the Mississippi River in Minneapolis/St. Paul.

The rally piggybacked on the very long-running weekly anti-war vigil on the bridge, which was launched in 2003 by Women Against Military Madness, or WAMM.

The effort to raise awareness of Monticello's relationship to Fukushima succeeded in bringing out the local news. With signs and banners demanding protection of the public drinking water the Mississippi provides, several rally participants spoke to a reporter from local KARE 11 News, and Nukewatch's John LaForge ended up in a segment of the evening news calling for the reactor's shutdown.

Xcel Energy's 55-year-old Monticello reactor — 35 miles northwest of Minneapolis/St. Paul — has the same design as the three devastated Fukushima units.

Two people drove to the rally from the city of Monticello and reported that they'd taken photos of an oil slick on the surface of the Mississippi, which resulted from a leak of lubricating oil from the reactor which began March 9. While Xcel Energy first announced that the oil would not reach the river, the company was forced to admit later that it had.

Local organizations representing thousands of residents in the Twin Cities and surrounding communities, including Monticello, launched the Coalition to raise awareness of the dangers of nuclear power following the massive 829,000-gallons leak of cooling water from the reactor in 2022. The Fukushima nuclear disaster of March 2011 is often ignored by the media.

At Fukushima, three reactors suffered complete core meltdowns and hydrogen explosions. It was the world's worst industrial disaster and the second-worst accidental radiation release in history — after Chernobyl. Following the March 11, 2011 earthquake (Japan's worst ever) and its resulting tsunami, Fukushima's GE "Mark-1" boiling water reactors — identical to the Monticello unit — suffered smashed reactor foundations, and a station black-out, or total loss of electric power.

A station black-out is a severe reactor crisis, because it stops the circulation of cooling water. This loss of cooling, if not reversed, causes fuel melting, massive radioactive releases, and — from Fukushima and from Chernobyl — radioactive "fallout" which spreads around the world.

Several common natural disasters could lead to a station blackout at Monticello: severe thunderstorms, tornadoes, and straight-line windstorms (derechos); floods, wildfires, and blizzards — or some combination — could cut power to the station. Back-up emergency generators are on hand to power cooling water circulation, but they are also subject to failure, as happened in Fukushima.

To learn more, see nuclearfreemississippi.wordpress.com or write to the Coalition at nuclearfreemississippi@zohomail.com. —JL

From the archives

1971 Monticello Reactor Releases Led to Mpls Water Shutoff

Editor's note: A look into archives of Minneapolis papers from the 1970s shows that the Monticello reactor has poisoned the Mississippi River in the past, and one of its spills was so radioactive that Minneapolis shut down its drinking water intake from the river. Verbatim transcripts from the papers follow.

NSP to delay atom discharges

***The Minneapolis Star,* Wed., Nov. 24, 1971, p.23**

Northern States Power Co. [now Xcel] has tentatively agreed to hold up on any future unexpected discharge of radioactive water from its Monticello nuclear power plant until state agencies can analyze the water, a Minnesota Health Department official said today.

Russell Frazier, chief of the laboratory analytical services of the department, said the agreement with NSP on future procedures was made after what he termed "the high drama which accompanied the release of a minor amount of radioactivity from the Monticello reactor."

Frazier said NSP has tentatively agreed to notify the state health department and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

He said that there was confusion and a lack of data last weekend when NSP decided to drain about 50,000 gallons of low-level radioactive water from the Monticello plant into the Mississippi to permit the repair of a loose baffle.

Fraizer said a "purely precautionary decision" was made by health officials and the Minneapolis Water Department to shut down the city water intake pump, which supplies drinking water to the city at a point about 30 miles downstream from Monticello.

"The action is no way a measure of the importance to be attached to the Monticello release," he said. □

Radioactive discharge fits state standards

***The Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Tue., Dec. 21, 1971, p.16**

Northern States Power (NSP) Company's Monticello nuclear plant Monday discharged 8,500 gallons of radioactive water that met state standards for the isotope cesium 137.

The 4 p.m. release, object of a week-long dispute between the firm and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA), was analyzed twice by PCA and Minnesota Health Department scientists.

First it was found to contain 4.1 microcuries of cesium 137, and then 5.7 microcuries. But an average of the two tests, 4.9 microcuries, fell below the state's weekly maximum limit of 5.3 microcuries for the isotope, said Grant Merritt, PCA director.

A "purely precautionary decision" was made by health officials and the Minneapolis Water Department to shut down the city water intake pump, which supplies drinking water to the city at a point about 30 miles downstream from Monticello.

The discharge came after NSP exchanged the water within the plant to produce a "cleaner" release. Earlier, PCA measurement had shown the cesium 137 to be about twice the amount allowed by the disputed state standards, although well below limits set by the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC).

PCA technicians today hope to sample a second batch of about 6,500 gallons that NSP says also must be discharged as part of a maintenance procedure.

Since NSP earlier said it would not discharge within 48 hours after a sample is taken, PCA officials said the second batch isn't expected to be released before Thursday.

An NSP spokesman confirmed yesterday's release but would not answer questions about the sampling or timing of the second discharge.

Merritt maintains that NSP earlier committed itself to meeting state standards, even though federal courts thus far have held that only AEC regulations apply to nuclear plants. The state restrictions on cesium 137 are from 100,000 to 100 million times more stringent than those of the AEC. □

A-water released by NSP

***The Minneapolis Star*, Wed., Dec. 29, 1971, p.29**

Five thousand gallons of radioactive water were released from the Monticello nuclear power plant into the Mississippi River today, according to a spokesman for the Northern States Power Co.

A Minnesota Pollution Control Agency spokesman said tests of the water showed that the levels of radioactive cesium-137 were 45 percent below state standards.

The PCA spokesman said overall radiation in the water was even lower than that.

The water is the second of two discharges NSP said it needed to make because of modification and maintenance work being done at the nuclear plant.

PCA officials had managed to get the first discharge delayed while they investigated radiation levels.

By splitting the discharge into two batches and waiting a week before letting the second one go, NSP was able to keep radiation levels below rigid state weekly standards.

Today's discharge began at 6 a.m. and an [NSP] spokesman said it normally would take five hours. □

Europeans, Vatican Reject U.S. War

Continued from p.1

Quoting a passage from the Christian Bible, the Pope said: "'Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen: your hands are full of blood.'"

Hegseth — a white supremacist and religious fundamentalist tattooed with the papal Crusader cross, who titled his book "American Crusade," and who paid $50,000 to a woman who accused him of sexual assault in 2017 — used a March 25 "Christian" worship service for military and civilian workers in Washington to pray for merciless killing. Hegseth prayed: "Let every round find its mark against the enemies of righteousness and our great nation. Give [U.S. warriors] wisdom in every decision, endurance for the trial ahead, unbreakable unity, and overwhelming violence of action against those who deserve no mercy."

In his apparent rebuttal four days later, Pope Leo told tens of thousands of worshippers, "This is our God: Jesus, king of peace, who rejects war, whom no one can use to justify war. He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them."

In March, when Trump demanded military help in forcing open the Strait of Hormuz, even Nigel Farange, the leader of Britain's right-wing Reform UK party, said England shouldn't participate in "another foreign war." Italy's Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini bluntly refused saying, "Italy isn't at war with anyone." And when Trump asked allies for naval help, Boris Pistorious, Germany's defense minister said "This is not our war; we have not started it."

Elsewhere around the world, Oman declared the U.S. war a violation of international law and warned of regional destabilization. Algeria called it a "flagrant violation of sovereignty" and "American-Zionist aggression." On April 2, over 100 U.S.-based international law experts signed an open letter calling the war "a clear violation of the UN Charter" involving possible violations of international humanitarian law, and "potential war crimes." Detailing profound concerns about the war, the letter was signed by senior professors, leaders of prominent international law associations, non-governmental organizations, and legal clinics, former government legal advisors, and military law experts inclucing former (U.S. military) Judge Advocates General.