

# GAINSAYER

NEWSLETTER FOR GEORGIANS AGAINST NUCLEAR ENERGY

WINTER 1989

## NUCLEAR WASTE: Will They Dump It on the South?

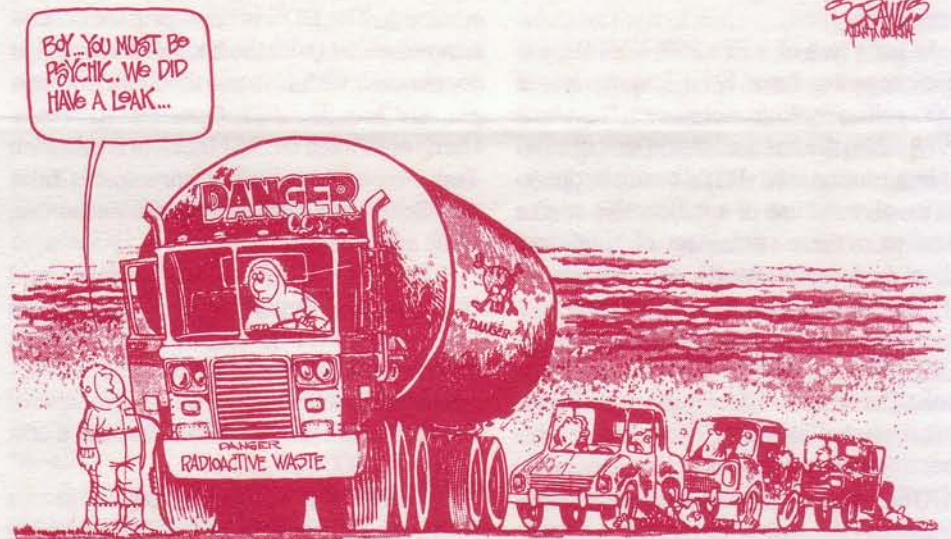
Several Georgians spoke in opposition to the Department of Energy's (DOE) latest proposal for a non-solution to the nuclear waste dilemma when the MRS Commission held its hearings in Atlanta in January.

What is MRS you might well ask? MRS stands for Monitored Retrievable Storage, a reincarnation of AFR -- Away From Reactor -- storage which was soundly defeated 10 years ago. In the dawn of the "peaceful atomic age" DOE contracted with the nuclear industry to handle the waste by-products of nuclear energy production. This contract comes into force in 1998, but DOE has made next-to-no movement towards the realization of a permanent, if not perfect, solution to the nuclear waste dilemma. With no hope of meeting that deadline at this point, they have made their highest priority to gain approval for an interim storage facility.

Technically speaking, an MRS would not use any new technology. It would consolidate spent fuel rods (high level radioactive waste) from the U.S.'s 108 reactors in dry cask storage which is now being used with success by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Dry cask storage is the method currently favored by environmentalists since it does not pose the dangers inherent in cooling pond storage. The water involved in cooling ponds is dangerous in that it can escape and pollute the biosphere, and if too much leaks, the spent fuel rods are then placed in danger of melting down.

Two primary objections which opponents have to the proposed MRS are 1) the doubling of handling and transportation of high-level radioactive waste (and a doubling of the risks from radioactive contamination) and 2) the diversion of monies and effort from the permanent solution/repository we so desperately need.

It is true that we need an interim solution to the nuclear waste which is fast outgrowing



space allotted for it at most of the nation's nuclear reactors. The soberest of all solutions would be to stop producing hazardous waste for which there is no known method of disposition. The most realistic and sober interim solution that is being advocated by environmentalists calls for dry cask storage at the point of waste generation until such time that the permanent repository is ready to receive waste.

Environmentalists found an unexpected ally for this position in the TVA which prepared years ago for the nuclear waste reality by making plans for interim storage. They too are disturbed by the possibility that funds set aside (paid by the utilities) for construction of a permanent repository will be usurped for an MRS and thereby enhance the probability of the MRS becoming a de facto permanent repository. It is important to note that TVA's proposition cannot be considered perfect since it suggests a scaled down user-funded MRS which still poses the transportation and handling risks. But it is significant that a utility has spoken out that it is possible for the utilities to deal with their own problem effec-

tively.

The MRS proposal is faltering without our help, actually. Congress was disturbed enough by it to pass it only with restrictions attached which greatly reduce its attractiveness to the utilities and DOE. The restrictions tie it to a permanent repository (although history shows that laws change and WE should not relax) and limit the amount of waste it can accept. Siting has been a significant problem. As soon as a community or state has learned it is being courted, a strong grassroots movement has sprung forth in opposition. It is notable that every proposed site has been in the southeast, and although Georgia has not yet been selected, we may be next.

Public participation in the January hearings was so overwhelming that the Commission added two more days of hearings held in Atlanta on February 16 and 17. Written testimony will be considered up until mid-March. Send an original and five copies to: Commissioners, MRS Review Commission, 1825 K Street NW, Suite 318, Washington, D.C. 20006.

— Glenn Carroll

# NUCLEAR ACCIDENT IN DECATUR

*"This could be the product-irradiation industry's Three Mile Island, prompting major reforms."*

Jim Setser

Dept. of Natural Resources,  
Environmental Protection Div..

Radiation Sterilizers, Inc. (RSI) in Decatur, Georgia, houses over 12 million curies of radioactive cesium-137 chloride. This is 12 times the amount of cesium released into the environment worldwide in the accident at Chernobyl.

At least two of RSI's 252 47,600-curie cesium capsules have been leaking into a 25,000-gallon cooling pool since at least June 6, 1988 when the contamination was discovered in a routine test. RSI's business operations involve the use of a radioactive source system to sterilize containers of single-use medical devices, foodstuffs, and other items.

The cesium waste capsules were manufactured at the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Hanford Nuclear Reserve in Washington. The cesium is double encapsulated in stainless steel. Cesium-137 is the waste most "attractive" for use in product irradiation as the DOE is leasing it at half the cost of cobalt-60 (currently the radiation source for most irradiators). The DOE has been spending millions of dollars annually to sell "cesium technology" to the commercial marketplace. Otherwise, cesium is merely highly radioactive hazardous waste and a liability rather than an asset.

In 1984, Allen Chin, RSI corporate president, testified before the U.S. House of Representatives on the use of cesium-137: "I certainly hope I will not have to wait the six months or more for [safety] tests to be run."

He said the company stood to "suffer financially" during the delay. The NRC originally required RSI to demonstrate the safety of the cesium capsules for one year in its Westerville, Ohio facility. The NRC dropped this requirement in October 1985 after being asked to do so by the DOE.

The Georgia Department of Human Resources licensed the facility but Georgia's Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the regulatory power over the irradiation facility did not become involved until this incident occurred. The DOE is managing the cesium removal effort (with the taxpayers money) in cooperation with RSI and the State of Georgia. On July 22, 1988, Governor Joe Frank Harris appointed the RSI Incident Evaluation Task Force comprised of participants from the Governor's office, Human Resources, DNR and the NRC.

Jim Setser, task force chairman, said "hardware and methods to detect and control leaks were never developed" because DOE officials and other experts thought the capsules couldn't leak. Numerous pieces of special test equipment have been fabricated at a cost of over \$1,000,000 so far.

"You're dealing with a very dangerous situation here," says Jim Setser. "We're trying to move as fast as possible but still do it right," he said. "We can't afford any mistakes."

Irradiation facilities house quantities of radioactive material second only to nuclear power plants. Cesium-137 chloride is highly water soluble. In the process of finding the leaking capsules, ultrasound tests revealed that a number of capsules have interior corrosion.

Workers' clothing and portions of home carpeting and car upholstery, in addition to

office carpeting and facility equipment were found to have illegal levels of radioactive contamination. There is no requirement for RSI to keep a record of when products are irradiated and where they are shipped. However, products that had been shipped in the interim prior to discovery of the contamination were located and tested. Dangerous radiation levels were detected on items in one truckload already shipped to Florida. The shipment included milk cartons, saline eye solution and disposable medical supplies. According to Jim Setser, "Every time we turned around out there we were running into another spot of radiation." All of the worker-contaminated items and contaminated products have been disposed as low-level radioactive waste in Barnwell, South Carolina.

RSI Decatur, located at 2300 Mellon Court, is zoned "M" for light industrial use, and is within 400 feet of residentially zoned property. Community residents have expressed concern over the safety of the groundwater which feeds two popular fishing lakes. Mrs. Frank Knight, owner of the lakes said, "I think they should let people know" when construction of such a facility is being proposed.

Even task force member Richard Woodruff of NRC agrees that "the public should know what's going on." The director of a day care center a few hundred yards away from RSI, said she hadn't known about the problem at RSI. It is interesting to note that the Department of Human Resources licenses both day care centers and irradiation facilities.

--- Glenn Carroll with John Willis,  
Executive Director Georgians for Safe  
Food

## TECH REACTOR UPDATE

It was almost a year ago that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) cited Georgia Tech for a long list of safety violations at their research reactor in downtown Atlanta. That's when the plant was shut down.

When the school made a formal request to reopen the nuclear reactor in August, GANE and other parties requested a public hearing. The NRC's response letter to GANE is dated October 11, 1988 and says, "The safety aspects of operating the reactor were all carefully reviewed at the time of licensing [1964, and revised 1974] and none of those considerations have been changed. The thrust of our

efforts over the past few months have been to improve certain management and administrative practices . . . and these issues will be resolved prior to giving our permission for restart . . . a hearing would not be useful from a safety standpoint."

The NRC did further delay permission to restart until Tech made additional safety improvements, including staff training, better safety procedures, and work on radiation monitoring equipment.

Then, as expected, on November 15, the NRC gave permission to resume reactor operations. At the same time, the NRC fined

the school \$5,000 for unsafe management of the reactor and "failure to take prompt and effective corrective action."

Although this is a small price to pay for the potential cost of a serious accident, it is the largest fine the NRC has ever levied on a university reactor. — Dennis Hoffarth

### WINTER GAINSAYER 1989

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Nuclear Information & Resource Service

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for bringing us into the desktop publishing age!

# GE BOYCOTT

In 1972, a Nuclear Regulatory (NRC) staff member recommended a ban on GE-type reactors in the U.S. A senior official responded that the idea was "attractive" but its implementation "could well be the end of nuclear power."

In 1975, General Electric Co.(GE) engineers, in the now-famous "Reed Report" (which was only uncovered in 1987), were highly critical of their company's nuclear reactors and recommended that they be taken off the market.

In 1986, a top NRC official admitted that the containment (the last barrier to radiation release in a meltdown) for GE's Mark design series has about a 90% chance of failure in an accident and that the failure could occur as early as 40 minutes into the accident.

In April 1988 Chairman of the Board for GE John F. Welch Jr. told shareholders, "In hindsight it's very clear we would not have entered the nuclear power business knowing the things we know now."

Georgians will be dismayed to learn that Georgia Power's Hatch I and Hatch II reactors in Baxley, Georgia, are of the notorious Mark I design. And, in the face of tremendous danger to the public, the company and its regulators have chosen profit over public service. As the U.S. nuclear industry has declined and orders for new reactors dropped off, GE has resorted to marketing its faulty product heavily *in the third world*.

INFACT, the company that led the Nestle's boycott, has launched a boycott against GE for its nuclear weapons work.

Nuclear Information & Resource Service (NIRS) has joined the effort, adding nuclear power to the list of concerns. The goal is to get GE out of the nuclear business, to force GE -- not local ratepayers -- to pay for design changes, and ultimately to shut down GE reactors.

An article in the *Wall Street Journal* (1/29/89) states that the NRC staff has made a recommendation to the Commission that \$150,000,000 in modifications to the 24 GE plants in the U.S. be made. The Commission has not yet made a decision on the issue.

GANE urges you to join the boycott and choose other brands than GE. If you want to participate in a petition drive or be otherwise active in this boycott, write NIRS and they'll provide you with your own boycott kit!

*NIRS (Nuclear Information & Resource Service, 1424 16th Street NW, Suite 601, Washington, DC 20036, 202/328-0002.*

## NUKE NOTES

- 11/6/88 (New York Times) Another Department of Energy coverup is being investigated, but this time there really is no danger to public health.

A top-secret workshop at the Rocky Flats nuclear weapon plant near Denver, Colorado seems to have improperly billed the United States for more than \$1,000,000 worth of items made between 1968 and 1985. These items, ranging from a \$15,000 hardwood staircase to gold and silver jewelry, were made for the private use of managers of Rockwell International Corp., the firm which

operates Rocky Flats.

Representative Michael L. Synar (D-Okla.) called the scam "symptomatic of a frightening breakdown in management" by the U.S. Department of Energy. Mr. Synar went on to say the history of the shop points to a system of "inadequate controls, lack of accountability and an attitude of indifference at the Department of Energy." Synar chairs the House Subcommittee on Environment, Energy and Natural Resources.

Rockwell Engineer J. David Navarette first brought the improper behavior to the Department of Energy's attention in 1985 when he tired of making changes to plans for a retirement home for the shop's supervisor, Warren Rooker. To date, the Department of Energy has made no attempt to recover the improper expenditures from Rockwell.

- 6/27/88 (The Nuclear Monitor) After nearly a three-year shutdown, the Tennessee Valley Authority's Sequoyah 2 reactor suffered five reactor trips (shut itself down) from its May 13 restart through June 9. Three of the trips, which bring the plant's lifetime total to 62, occurred at above 70% power. Meanwhile, the Natural Rights Center in Tennessee is continuing its efforts to close the plant at least temporarily due to concerns over the emergency diesel generators, which the Center claims could not handle emergency loads.

- 8/10/88 (Le Monde, France) A vehicle transporting a gamatron containing cesium-137, intended for use in verification of solders, disappeared in Normandy, France, at the beginning of August. A week later, the van still had not been found, but the gamatron had been located, intact, in a local garbage dump.

## YES! I'd rather be active than radioactive!

*I am a "Georgian Against Nuclear Energy."*

*I support the goals of phasing out the use of nuclear energy as soon as possible, optimizing the use of energy conservation and renewable energy, and opposing the use of nuclear weapons.*

- \$ 5 Active!
- \$10 Active!
- \$25 Active!
- \$50 Active!
- \_\_\_\_\_ Active!

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

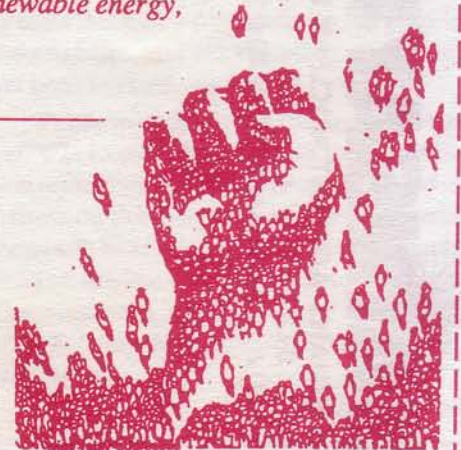
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Fill out and return today before it's too hot! **Georgians Against Nuclear Energy**  
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# SAVANNAH RIVER PLANT: A GANE FOCUS FOR 1989?

At the October forum on the Savannah River Plant, Bob Alvarez of the Environmental Policy Institute described a nuclear weapons industry at the point of collapse. Cumulative mismanagement problems which largely disregarded safety concerns and aging facilities on the verge of falling apart have forced the Department of Energy into a crisis. The public eye, once kept shut by the cold war rallying cry of national security, is focusing in on the problem, a problem that many of us have known about for years.

The DOE, priding itself on its candor (count how many times they used that word at the forum) has called for billions of dollars to get its house in order and then get on with business as usual. Billions will be spent on a cleanup, but the question remains if DOE will get more billions to build new production facilities for plutonium and tritium. The DOE, being "awash" in plutonium, claims that it is being faced with cannibalizing other weapons of their tritium in order to keep that explosion-enhancing gas at "proper" levels. But, as France Hart put it, it's the nation's health care and education systems that are being cannibalized by DOE, and anyway, with global disarmament on the international agenda we could make it our *plan* to match the phase out of nuclear weapons to the decay rate of tritium.

Given the backdrop of heightened public concern, we are at a crossroads in regards to this country's nuclear policy. The choices are clear. We can cleanup DOE, keep plutonium and tritium facilities shut down and negotiate with the Soviets on a mutual moratorium of additional nuclear weapons material produc-

tion or we can fund a new generation of DOE facilities and continue with subsequent waste problems while continuing the arms race.

Although both Senators Nunn and Fowler have stated their support for a new production reactor at SRP, they did so before the media began front page coverage of the issue. We can still change their thinking on the matter, and in fact, it is imperative that we try. It is our input that will, to a large degree, chart new DOE policies. Never before have we had such an opportunity and we must take it.

The GANE forum took place during a nationwide movement to keep DOE shut down. The national group SANE/FREEZE, at its national congress in Atlanta last December, set the shut down as one of its main goals for 1989. Locally, the Atlanta Nuclear Freeze/ Jobs With Peace is likewise committed and has recently created an SRP committee. It is likely the Atlanta FREEZE group, GANE, and other concerned individuals and groups will form an effective and on-going task force to concentrate on DOE.

Starting from those that co-sponsored the October forum, it is hoped that a working group from area environmental and peace and justice groups will be formed. Lobbying and citizen education will necessarily be a focus of the group's efforts.

Ideas, input, energy, and participation are needed. If you have any thoughts on how to go about creating a Georgia SRP task force, your ideas are welcome. A national DOE meeting by SANE/FREEZE on January 25 will also help give direction. To give advice or help out, please call Tom Clements at 373-6475 and, in the meantime, keep your own

production facilities at high power levels and write a few letters to your Congressional representatives (may I suggest concentrating on Rep. Ben Jones and Senator Wyche Fowler).

To be alerted as to upcoming SRP action, either call me, the GANE number or the Nuclear Freeze (586-0460).

--- Tom Clements, 404-373-6475



## ATOMIC PRIMER

Isn't nuclear power an environmentally clean technology? Nuclear plants may not emit black smoke, but every year, each of our nation's 107 reactors releases harmful radioactivity into the air and water as part of its normal operation.

In addition, each reactor produces about 30 tons of lethal, high-level radioactive waste per year -- and there is no safe permanent way of getting rid of it. Dangerous radioactivity and waste are created on each step of the "fuel chain," from the milling of uranium for fuel rods to the clean-up of operating reactors.

Most experts believe no level of radiation is safe for humans. Small doses over long periods of time have been linked to increased cancers, blood disorders, impaired immunity and high incidences of miscarriages and birth defects. Any exposure to radiation increases one's risk of adverse health effects.

*SOURCE: Nuclear Information & Resource Service (NIRS), 1424 16th Street NW, Suite 601, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 328-0002.*

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