

Letters to the Editor and Guest Editorials of 2011.

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13 December, 2011

Letter to the Editor
The Augusta Chronicle - Augusta GA

MOX facility scores highly

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission announced in a letter Dec. 5 that it will hold a public hearing on Dec. 15 at Newberry Hall to present its findings on the performance of the work for fiscal year 2011 on the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility at Savannah River Site.

This annual performance evaluation's bottom line is that the NRC found no issues meeting the criteria for "requiring management attention." For those of us who have been involved in large government projects before, this kind of report card is almost unheard of. The National Nuclear Security Administration and its prime contractor, Shaw AREVA MOX Services, are to be congratulated for outstanding performance.

The Savannah River Site's future will be enhanced as an enduring site if the U.S. Department of Energy, NNSA and their contractors continue to set the standard for performance that we have grown to expect of them.

Clint Wolfe
Aiken, S.C.

21 August, 2011

Letter to the Editor
The Aiken Standard - Aiken SC

Anti-nuke columnist wrong on facts

A guest column by an anti-nuclear alarmist in *The State* newspaper on July 29 addressed potential missions at the Savannah River Site. He chose to play on readers' emotions in lieu of using facts.

He said the nuclear industry engages in "indiscriminate nuclear dumping." Nuclear waste sites are robust engineered facilities, well characterized, permitted and monitored. "Dump" is an inaccurate and inflammatory descriptor for nuclear waste disposal facilities.

He referred to "deadly" high level waste at SRS. I suppose it is deadly in the sense that a 10-story building is deadly. That is, if you choose to jump off the building or hug the high level waste they could both kill you. But why would you do that? Nuclear waste has never killed anybody.

He said there is "no market" for "dangerous" MOX fuel. That will come as a surprise to the more than 30 nuclear power plants currently using MOX fuel and the 20 more planning to use it. He doesn't say why it is "dangerous." When electric power producers can purchase the fuel and recover their costs for necessary analyses and regulatory hurdles there will be a market for this fuel. It is a business decision.

If our country is going to progress and eventually close the nuclear fuel cycle, the professionals at the SRS are the best qualified people in the country to do the job successfully and safely. Let's let them do it.

Clint Wolfe

July 21, 2011

Guest Column in
The State - Columbia SC

**Wolfe: A safe dose of radiation?
by Clint Wolfe**

"Hormesis," a Greek word meaning "impel, urge on," refers to the phenomenon by which gradually adding a toxic substance to an organism produces an initial beneficial effect. For example, if you had no salt in your body you could not live, and as you added salt, your health would improve. At some point, adding more salt would be harmful. The same effect is seen with vitamins and minerals, as there are many that you can't live without but that are toxic in high doses. This also is true of certain vaccines, which are small quantities of viruses that, when introduced to the body, stimulate a protective immune response.

The concept of small doses of radiation having beneficial effects on living organisms fits this model but is contradictory to the often-quoted idea that "there is no safe level of radiation." This pronouncement derives from a data treatment called "linear no threshold" or LNT. It assumes that, if there is an observed detrimental effect of very high levels of radiation on human health, then there will be a proportionate detrimental effect at lower levels of radiation.

Those who use this methodology also often assume that doses are cumulative across individuals in a large group. To illustrate, assume that 100 aspirin tablets represent a fatal dose to an individual. LNT suggests that if you give one aspirin to 100 people, then one of them will die because, in total, a fatal dose has been delivered. It is in this way that large numbers of cancer deaths are projected from very low radiation exposures to very large populations. Now you know where all those alarming projections of cancer deaths originate. We've been duped.

It's hard to argue that ionizing radiation has no effect on human cells, as it is generally agreed that DNA alterations in a cell could result from absorbing ionizing radiation and possibly lead to formation of a cancer. But to put that argument in perspective, background radiation contributes about 0.00004 percent of the body's total DNA alterations, with 99.99996 percent coming from other causes. This comparison and others are discussed in Alan E. Waltar's book, *Radiation and Modern Life*.

Although the LNT methodology is useful for providing a basis for protection for radiation workers, there are no credible empirical data implicating low levels of ionizing radiation in human-health problems. This is not surprising in light of the incredibly low impact of radiation on total DNA alterations.

On the other hand, there are considerable data on laboratory animals and selected populations of humans from epidemiological studies that show beneficial effects of low levels of radiation. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the states with the lowest cancer death rates are largely those with the highest background radiation levels. A 10-year study of 70,000 shipyard workers building nuclear-powered ships showed that those who received radiation doses higher than the levels of the non-nuclear workers at the same location had lower death rates from leukemia and lymphatic cancers. The correlations are astounding, although one must be cautious in assigning cause-and-effect relationships based on these kinds of data, because not all of the potentially important variables are well-controlled. Attempts to glean health effects from low-level exposures to radiation often are doomed because other variables such as lifestyle and diet may dwarf the effects of radiation.

My point is that even if you don't believe that some low levels of radiation are good for you, perhaps we can stop the hysteria about low levels causing harm. Based on what we know to date, there's no reason to think that even the most highly irradiated workers at Fukushima will suffer harmful health effects.

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Espousing a hypothesis that is so contrary to conventional wisdom always carries the risk of being labeled a kook. Not wanting to be so labeled, I will not recommend a daily dose of low-level radiation. (Of course, I don't have to do that; you are already getting it.) What I do recommend is that, the next time you hear a prophecy of doom due to exposure to low levels of radiation, you take it with a healthy grain of salt.

Dr. Wolfe is executive director of Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness in Aiken. Reach him at cnta@bellsouth.net.

July 6, 2011

Letter/column in
The Augusta Chronicle - Augusta GA

Examine big picture of MOX mission

A reader's letter to the editor June 27 ("Rethink the MOX mission at SRS") expressed his opinion that the mixed-oxide fuel project should be reconsidered -- an opinion to which he is certainly entitled.

I would like to first consider his reference to cost vs. the alternative. The decision to make MOX fuel out of weapons-grade plutonium was reached after considering numerous disposition paths. Each of the alternatives had financial, technical or political shortcomings. Discussions with the Russians over how to dispose of plutonium became necessary after agreements between our countries in 1993 that provided for the dismantling of U.S. and Russian nuclear weapons.

Reciprocity was a given as a matter of trust, and the Russians would not consider treating highly enriched uranium and plutonium as wastes. They maintained, and correctly so, that these materials were valuable sources of energy. As a consequence, blend-down of highly enriched uranium from former Soviet nuclear weapons that were aimed at us and our allies now provides 50 percent of our nuclear generated electricity in the United States today.

This agreement already has netted a huge economic benefit to the United States and to any country with nuclear-generating capacity, as the cost of uranium for fuel has been moderated by this huge supply from the Russian and U.S. arsenals.

The plutonium portion of the weapons agreements was slower in coming to fruition, but each country committed to an initial disposition of 34 metric tons with more possibly to follow. This represents about 50 percent of all the weapons-grade plutonium ever produced in the United States. Conversion of this material into mixed-oxide fuel will power a million homes for more than 50 years, and that energy is worth tens of billions of dollars.

Choosing to delay or cancel the MOX project would require revisiting all the old alternatives, including surveillance, and all of them cost a lot of money. Add to that the potential for our treaty partners to take exception to our renegeing, and we introduce the possibility of the loss of credibility in a crucial area of our foreign policy. The Russians were suspicious of proposed disposition paths that left the plutonium in a recoverable state.

So a big-picture look at the MOX project reveals advantages that can't be measured in mere dollars and cents. The project has helped kick-start a dormant nuclear manufacturing supply chain whose rebirth is a must if we are to build the next generation of nuclear power plants.

MOX represents the culmination of two superpowers stepping back from the unthinkable and converting an awesome amount of potential destruction into energy, while rendering the plutonium unusable for weapons for all time.

This modern example of "swords to plowshares" is an amazing achievement in our foreign policy and how we interact with our former adversary. Trashing that accomplishment in the name of tight budgets would be penny-wise and pound-foolish.

Clint Wolfe
Aiken, S.C.

Produced by Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness.

(The writer is executive director of Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness, and formerly chaired the Technical Advisory Panel to the Department of Energy's Plutonium Focus Area.)

April 18, 2011

Editorial in
The Aiken Standard - Aiken SC

**Future for nuclear workers remains bright
by Dr. Susan A. Winsor**

Interestingly, our region today finds itself at the heart of the atom's rebirth. After three dormant decades, reliance on nuclear power is increasing as electric utilities in South Carolina and Georgia move forward with new construction of additional units at their existing nuclear plant sites at V.C. Summer and Vogtle, and government initiatives progress such as the Mixed Oxide Fuel (MOX) facility at the Savannah River Site.

Nuclear energy is a growth industry. Local nuclear employers estimate they will need 10,000 new workers to support their ventures over the next decade including professional, engineering, craft, and technical. This was confirmed in a 2009 study conducted by the consulting firm of Booz, Allen & Hamilton for the SRS Community Reuse Organization (SRSCRO).

Retirements and attrition in the experienced workforce and a lack of understanding about nuclear career opportunities among young people have left employers perilously short of the qualified talent they will need in the years ahead. Students in middle and high school today will be needed to advance our nation's energy independence.

Even as more than 1,000 employees will be impacted as part of the recently announced workforce restructuring from one of eight current contractors at SRS, it has been reported that more than 2,000 job listings exist in a data base at the workforce transition office for consideration.

The long-term demand for nuclear power is strong. In recent days, comments of support for this vital energy source have poured from our region's utilities, renowned scientists, regulators, members of Congress, the White House, and those potentially most affected - neighbors to our existing nuclear power plants.

President Obama's support for nuclear energy is clear in his March 30 remarks on America's Energy Security where he touted the significant benefit of nuclear energy as a non-carbon emitting power source that provides one-fifth of our nation's electricity. He emphasized the importance of continuing to invest in a workforce that leads to energy independence for our nation.

All have cautioned against a rush to judgment based on still unfolding events at the Fukushima reactors following Japan's record earthquake and devastating tsunami, rightly reminding us that no energy source, including oil and coal, is without risks.

The fact is - locally we depend on nuclear energy for our energy needs. South Carolina's five nuclear units supply about one half of the state's electricity demand. In Georgia, four nuclear units account for more than 25 percent of the state's electricity.

We also depend on highly skilled nuclear workers. These workers are essential to achieving our nation's safe and reliable energy independence and they are well-respected for maintaining the distinct skills and firm standards required by the industry. Workers with these capabilities are also sought by other advanced technology industries nationwide.

Through its new Nuclear Workforce Initiative (NWI), the SRSCRO is strongly committed to a collaborative local program that enhances worker skills and opportunities for economic growth in the nuclear and

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technology sectors throughout our region. As our region strengthens its nuclear workforce to support the nation's energy challenge, we are simultaneously building a workforce that is attractive to other advanced technology investment in our community.

The NWI effort - with its slogan "Growing Our Own Through Collaboration" - received a major boost in March when the Department of Energy awarded a grant, as announced by the SRSCRO, for use by five area colleges and universities to train workers for existing and future nuclear-related and other high technology jobs.

The grant funds will be shared by Aiken Technical College, Augusta State University, Augusta Technical College, University of South Carolina Aiken, and University of South Carolina Salkehatchie. The DOE grant is timely in helping these educational institutions gear up to provide the training needed to ensure the workforce is ready for future jobs in government and commercial nuclear facilities and other high-tech opportunities.

The five colleges also are partnering with DOE in science, technology, mathematics, and research through a formal Memorandum of Understanding which acknowledges a long-term goal of expanding opportunities for joint work and support.

Importantly, this is the first time area colleges from both sides of the Savannah River have collaborated on a grant, underscoring a strong, unified commitment to regional workforce development.

As a region, we must be sure that the nuclear workers needed in the years ahead will be available. And, just as important, we need to ensure that our local citizens have ample opportunity to successfully compete for these jobs to advance a proven energy technology and to prepare for other high technology industries.

Susan Winsor is President of Aiken Technical College and chair of the SRSCRO Nuclear Workforce Initiative Task Force.

April 17, 2011

Guest Column in
The Augusta Chronicle - Augusta GA

Accident in Japan begs for context to stress safety of atomic power

Josef Stalin is reported to have said, "When one person dies, it is a 'tragedy.' When a million people die, it is a 'statistic.'" Perhaps the sentiment that he expressed explains the seemingly irrational opposition in this country by the anti-nuclear lobby toward nuclear power.

The next person killed in this country in the commercial production of electricity from nuclear power will be the first and the industry is more than half a century old and produces 20% of our nation's electricity. If we ever do have a fatality in the nuclear industry there will be an outcry from some to shut down the plants, congressmen will hold hearings, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will likely introduce new regulations, all in response to the "tragedy."

The production of the other 80% of our energy over the last half century has resulted in more than one million deaths from carbon based air pollution, oil and gas explosions, coal mining accidents, and petroleum fires. Add to these "statistics" the incredible environmental insult from oil spills, acid mine drainage, mountaintop removal, and solid waste pollution from the combustion of coal and you wonder how otherwise rational people can even consider alternatives to nuclear power. There is an apparent emotional link between nuclear weapons and the use of nuclear power.

The anti-nuclear lobby does not discriminate between the perceived evil of the weapons and what should be the goodness of the energy from nuclear power. Uranium is simply the natural resource that makes both possible. We don't seem to have a similar problem with other natural resources such as iron ore. Iron ore is the starting point for the most murderous weapon in the history of mankind, the machete. It is also the starting point for steel for schools, hospitals, bridges, homes, etc. No one suggests not using steel for the latter purposes because of its role in so much human tragedy.

Something in our collective psyche tells us we should fear radiation, even though we are bathed in it naturally every day by our environment, our granite countertops and our loved ones. Yes, we get measurable doses of radiation exposure from people, especially those with big muscles because the radioactive isotope potassium 40 tends to concentrate in muscle tissue. Even coal fired power plants release more than 100 times more radiation than a nuclear power plant.

Almost all we know about the effects of radiation on human health are derived from epidemiological studies of the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. You would think with all the emphasis on avoiding exposure to radiation that there would be damning evidence from that study related to such exposures. Actually, the data suggest only a very weak correlation between solid cancer incidence and very high doses of radiation and no correlation between solid cancers and lower levels of exposure. The most convincing correlations indicated higher rates of leukemia (3 per 1000 instead of the expected 2 per 1000) due to the exposure.

Ultimately, decisions about energy choices should be based on risk-reward kinds of analyses. There are risks associated with every decision that we make. Even a decision to do nothing has risk involved. You can decide to go shopping, but there is a finite risk that you will be killed in an auto accident. You can decide to stay home but there is a finite risk that you will be killed while falling down the stairs.

How well we manage real, rather than perceived risks, will determine the safety of our energy future. There is ample evidence to show that the nuclear industry manages those risks extremely well as they continue their outstanding safety record and avoid the aforementioned "tragedy."

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Clint Wolfe
Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness

April 13, 2011

Letter to the Editor of
The State - Columbia SC

Nuclear threat has been overblown

The Japanese twin disasters of earthquake and tsunami represented perhaps the most potent "one-two punch" in recorded history. The human tragedy associated with these events was felt by all of us as we witnessed through news accounts the desperate situation of the Japanese people.

Headlines blared on cable TV, "Nuclear crisis grows, 10,000 dead." The immediate conclusion by viewers and apparently the desired conclusion by the news report was that the two facts were somehow related. They, of course, were not. No one died as a result of the reactor accidents.

I believe there may be a silver lining to the nuclear bashing that is sure to come from the anti-nuclear crowd. That silver lining is embodied in access to information that was not available during and after Three Mile Island and Chernobyl. That access is provided by the internet and search engines that can put vast amounts of information at one's disposal.

This time we know because of exhaustive studies of the prior nuclear incidents that the sky is not falling. In fact, other than radiation poisoning involving first responders at Chernobyl, it is not obvious that there were unambiguous human health effects caused by either of the two events. You don't have to take my word for it! That's the silver lining! You can Google "Three Mile Island" or "Chernobyl" and get the facts for yourself!

We should learn what we can from the lessons of Fukushima, incorporate them in our nuclear culture and get on with building new units as quickly as possible.

Clint Wolfe
Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness

April 10, 2011

Editorial in
The Aiken Standard - Aiken SC

Media Nuclear Hype Misleading

With the occasional notable exception, the American media's coverage of the Japan nuclear reactor crisis has been irresponsible at best and terroristic at worst. On an evening CBS Newscast, even Katie Couric (one of my favorites) said that the nuclear crisis in Japan had now overshadowed the earthquake and tsunami. In whose twisted mind?

We all watched in horror as the twin disasters of a gigantic earthquake followed by an enormous tsunami swept Japanese people and towns to destruction. Our hearts were heavy with compassion for the plight of these victims whose numbers were likely to build to more than 25,000. To place the nuclear incident in the same category as this human tragedy is to minimize the importance of human life.

Anyone who wants to write the definitive account of the Japanese nuclear plants' story following the earthquake and tsunami will have to wait a while for clarity with regard to the sequence of events. However, it is not too early to make some observations about how we are all getting our information about these events. Much of the media coverage is provided in a sensational manner by people who are used to covering less technical issues. The nuclear community doesn't make it any easier for the uninitiated as there have been at least six different units used in the reporting thus far to describe radiation levels [Curies, Becquerels, RADs, Grays, Sieverts, Rems, and their associated fractions, m(milli) and u(micro)].

It is small wonder then that there is confusion about radiation levels and what is normal versus worrisome versus alarming. For the rest of this story I will speak in millirem (mrem), largely because I am old-fashioned and I can't think in Becquerels or Grays. We can place the exposures in perspective if we realize that one chest x-ray delivers about 10 mrem, a full dental exam about 160 mrem, and a mammogram about 250 mrem.

When I started in the nuclear business many years ago, nuclear workers who would help conduct inspections during outages were allowed 10,000 mrem of accumulated exposure annually. Because the pay was good and workers were out of work if they got more than 10,000 mrem, some were inclined to doctor their records so they could get more work. These were referred to in the trade as "crispy critters." The federal government later reduced the annual occupational dose for federal nuclear workers to 5,000 mrem which is where the limit is today, well below any credible estimate of a potentially harmful level. Not content to just comply, the Department of Energy sets a limit of 2,000 mrem for its workers. The average occupational radiation dose at the Savannah River Site for radiation workers is about 60-70 mrem per year in addition to their background dose which is about 300 mrem per year or about 600 mrem per year including medical procedures

Now, how do these stack up against dangerous levels? Half of the people exposed to radiation levels of 450,000 mrem in an acute exposure will die within 3-6 weeks in the absence of medical intervention. This is radiation poisoning. Generally speaking, levels of 10,000 mrem in an acute exposure and 20,000 mrem in a chronic exposure per year are safe and represent the thresholds for observable increases in human cancer. Naturally occurring background levels of radiation around the world typically range from 200 to 20,000 mrem per year with no apparent health effects.

When it comes to radiation effects on people, we can hypothesize, but we can't run radiation experiments on humans to determine causal relationships. We can however, look at preceding major radiation exposures and infer from the medical evaluations of these populations the nature and severity of the health effects.

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The most definitive study was performed on 86,572 survivors (the cohort) of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the Radiation Effects Research Foundation. In the medium to high exposure category (30,000 mrem to 600,000 mrem) after 45 years of follow-up, the study expected 7,244 deaths from solid cancers if there were no effects of the exposure. They found 7,578 deaths, so they attribute 334 deaths from solid cancers to the effects of the radiation. Epidemiological studies typically have a 3-5% margin of error, but let us assume the attribution is exactly correct. This means that a member of the cohort was 0.4% more likely to die of a solid cancer than an individual not exposed to such high levels of radiation.

The message is that the correlation between radiation doses and morbidity are very weak at very high doses and nonexistent at lower doses of radiation. The health impacts on humans from the radiation released from the Japanese reactors will be negligible with the possible exception of impacts to the plant workers. People in Illinois who are trying to buy potassium iodide as an antidote for radiation exposure caused by the Japanese reactors are victims of a colossal hoax.

Clint Wolfe
Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness

March 15, 2011

Letter to the Editor
The Aiken Standard - Aiken SC

Headline unnecessarily alarming

I read in the banner headline on the front page of the March 10 Aiken Standard : "Five MOX violations discovered." The headline above the article on page 2A read "Review finds five violations at MOX facility." The accompanying article by Anna Dolianitis, staff writer for the Standard was well written and basically portrayed that the review was yet another good report on the contractor's performance if one understands that the findings were of the lowest significance of four levels that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission tracks.

This number of relatively minor findings in a \$4.8B project is an excellent report card. Headlines are supposed to grab attention, and I suppose "Project Continues Outstanding Performance" doesn't pass the test.

Clint Wolfe, Executive Director
Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness (CNTA)
Aiken

February 28, 2011

Editorial

The Aiken Standard - Aiken SC

President's 2012 Budget Request for SRS Lacking

The Savannah River Operations Office of Environmental Management (EM) of the Department of Energy (DOE) unveiled their guidance for funding at SRS for 2012 this past week. Dr. David Moody, the DOE site manager, will have to examine the cards he has been dealt and try to make the most out of a budget proposal that does not fully meet the needs that many believe are crucial to our nation's well being.

Let us look at the priorities of EM at the site. I'll list them in the order that I believe they exist on DOE's priority list, but that is sort of like asking parents to rank their children as to which they love the most.

First we have commitments to stabilize the high level liquid waste; next, the successful completion and operation of the Salt Waste Processing Facility which is integral to meeting the first priority; number three is to meet commitments to ship targeted amounts of transuranic waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, N.M.; next is to provide research, development and demonstration (RD&D) capability for the back end of the commercial nuclear fuel cycle; and the fifth one would be to achieve a targeted footprint reduction of 75% in 2012.

Let me draw your attention to the fourth one on the list, RD&D. Ordinarily, that priority might read "process and package uranium and plutonium bearing materials" or "process foreign and domestic research reactor fuel in H-Area." H-Area includes the chemical processing facilities H-Canyon and HB-Line. As a result of international nonproliferation treaties, SRS has been the recipient of these fuels from the U.S. and other countries as a means of assuring that highly enriched uranium does not fall into the wrong hands. There are currently about 15,000 used fuel rods in L-Area at SRS awaiting processing in H-Area.

At this point I beg your forbearance for taking a jaundiced view of bureaucracy. It seems that somewhere in Washington, DC, someone has decided that to process the used fuel in H-Area would constitute a "new" project. Because the government is likely to be funded by a "continuing resolution" instead of a new budget, "new" projects cannot be funded, ergo, no processing of fuel in H-Area. Now never mind that this noble mission of nonproliferation has been a constant activity in H-Area for two decades, that it satisfies international commitments, and that L-Area is not meant for indefinite storage of this material - regardless, bureaucracy will be served.

Without the fuel processing, H-Area has minimal immediate scope and the inevitable questions are begged about shutting down H-Canyon and HB-Line, a potentially colossal mistake as they are the only facilities this country has capable of recycling used fuel.

H-Area is crucial to the nation's energy security, because it is key to potential activities at SRS that are related to new energy missions such as the development of Small Modular Reactors, the demonstration of nuclear fuel recycling protocols which would increase the energy recovery from the fuel, and to the development of reactors to eventually extract nearly 100% of the energy content of the fuel. The current once through cycle used in U.S. reactors extracts only about 3% of the energy value in the uranium.

The radioactivity of the waste from a combination of recycling and new reactor designs is greatly reduced, which eliminates the need to consider disposal options that invoke periods of thousands or millions of years. SRS personnel already know how to put such waste in a safe configuration as witnessed by the more than 3,000 canisters of defense high level waste encased in borosilicate glass that are currently stored there,

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ostensibly awaiting removal to Yucca Mountain, but if that option is taken off the table, the good people in Carlsbad, N.M. would like very much for us to send the waste to them.

The people at SRS demonstrably know how to recycle nuclear fuel and render the waste safe for all time and the people at WIPP want that waste sent to them for emplacement in a salt formation that is nearly 250 million years old, a half mile under the surface of N.M. Case closed!

Although the President's Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future is not charged with recommending sites, it is quite likely that one of their recommendations will be to examine the options for recycling protocols for used nuclear fuel. It would be ironic if a bureaucrat in D.C. who has defined continuing to meet 20-year old treaty commitments as a "new" start would preempt such an important potential recommendation from the President's Blue Ribbon Commission.

Faced with this dilemma, DOE has said that it will make no final decision on the future of H-Area until after the Blue Ribbon Commission issues its final report in January 2012 and to its credit is supporting a stance of minimal safe operating condition for H-Area. Even with this approach a few hundred personnel may be reassigned and it is unlikely they could ever be reassembled or their expertise preserved.

I believe Dr. Moody is going to do the very best that anyone could do, given the hand he has been dealt; however, we need to see to it that he gets dealt a new hand. We should ask our government officials at all levels, regardless of political affiliation to get behind an initiative to adequately fund H-Area. Our energy future may depend on it.

Dr. Clint Wolfe,
Executive Director
Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness (CNTA)

February 8, 2011

Letter to the Editor
The State - Columbia SC

The letter in your Jan. 13, 2011, edition, entitled "Nuclear cleanup very expensive" is somewhat misleading.

The author attempts to tie nuclear weapons legacy clean up to the mission of the Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) which is basically, "what to do about the commercial nuclear fuel cycle?" The cost of the cleanup of the nuclear weapons legacy waste at the Savannah River Site (SRS) and other DOE nuclear sites is a mortgage that the American people willingly took on decades ago as the Cold War called into question our survival as a nation and as a world. That war was thankfully won by patriots such as those at SRS.

The river pollution to which she refers in each case is a tiny fraction of safe levels determined by the Environmental Protection Agency.

She refers to "weapons grade waste." There is no such thing. Used nuclear fuel is a rich source of energy. That is why it is on the BRC's agenda for closing the fuel cycle.

She says Lindsey Graham supports reprocessing even though George Bush did not. Not true. The Bush administration floated a proposal in 2006 to deal with international oversight of reprocessing. Senator Graham has been a knowledgeable supporter and has encouraged bipartisan cooperation on the issue in partnership with Senator John Kerry (D) of Massachusetts.

Misinformation tends to politicize this important public debate. We don't need that. We need more Graham/Kerry initiatives.

Dr. Clint Wolfe,
Executive Director
Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness (CNTA)

January 20, 2011

Letter to the Editor
The Aiken Standard - Aiken SC

Nuclear energy is feasible and safe

In your Jan. 12, 2011, edition, you published a letter from a reader who commented on the recent meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future in Augusta and offered opinions as to the appropriate choices for our future energy supplies. Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness (CNTA) encourages public discourse on these matters, but cautions that, while everyone is entitled to his or her own opinions, no one is entitled to his or her own facts.

The first misstatement in the letter is in the title, "Nuclear energy not feasible; ..." Not only is it feasible, electricity produced from safe, clean nuclear power has been with us for over half a century. Nuclear power currently produces 20% of the nation's electricity. I believe that more than passes the "feasibility" test.

A figure of \$400B is mentioned in the letter for government's cost to process waste. The writer doesn't mention what waste costs \$400B, but it certainly is not commercial nuclear waste as that cost is born by the various utilities and their ratepayers.

The author states, "this lethal legacy is harming our health and our environment, ..." The fact is that all commercial nuclear waste is secured, monitored, and guarded and it has never harmed anybody, so even the term "lethal" seems a bit excessive. Nor is it harming the environment or our health as it is shielded from the environment and from people. Contrast that with the death and environmental destruction that has resulted from using fossil fuels. The nonprofit Clean Air Task Force commissioned research indicating 24,000 premature deaths annually in the U.S. alone from burning coal and Princeton University estimated 380,000 premature deaths annually world-wide. More than 2.2 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide are emitted to the atmosphere annually in the U.S. due to fossil fuel-generated electricity.

The author laments on behalf of alternatives, "... we need at least a fair share of all the subsidized money that is siphoned by the powers that be: nuclear, oil, and coal."

Recent energy subsidies provided by the federal tax code provided about \$10B in energy subsidies. Of this amount about 2% went for nuclear, 3% for coal, 24% for refined coal, 21% for gas and petroleum, 40% for alternative energies, and 10% for miscellaneous projects. Again, I believe getting 40% of the energy incentives probably passes the "fair share" test. Nuclear got 2% of the pot, and we can probably agree with the author that the other shares seem distorted considering the need to encourage carbon free energy production. The U.S. Energy Information Administration is a good source of data on this subject.

Our purpose is not to stifle public debate, but rather to stimulate informed public discussion related to the energy choices of the future and ultimately how we can bring the assets in our region to bear on the best solutions. That was really the theme of much of the discussion at the Blue Ribbon Commission hearing.

CNTA is a non-profit education organization and will be happy to assist anyone interested in obtaining factual information about nuclear technologies.

Clint Wolfe,
Executive Director
Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness (CNTA)

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