



BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN NUCLEAR DANGERS & A SAFE, SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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BRIDGE THE GAP CELEBRATES 40TH ANNIVERSARY IN 2010

IN MAY 1970, with the country divided over a distant war, environmental risks, and the nuclear threat, a committee was established to work to bridge those gaps. During the ensuing years we contributed to successfully blocking the proposed Ward Valley nuclear waste dump near the Colorado River; the shutdown of the UCLA reactor; the Dept. of Energy's Santa Susana Field Laboratory and Hanford N reactor (and thereby, U.S. plutonium production for nuclear weapons); the international ban on dumping radioactive waste in the ocean; stopping the plans for orbiting nuclear reactors and bombs for "Star Wars"; and the removal of significant amounts of weapons-grade

uranium from places where it could readily be stolen and tightening of security against terrorist attack at nuclear reactors.

Nearly forty years later, we continue, as do the gaps that need to be bridged. But next year we will celebrate, marking forty years of contributions to a safe, sustainable future. Grammy award winning singer/songwriter Amanda McBroom (The Rose) has already committed to a special dinner and concert on June 13, 2010 and there is much more in the works. Look for details and events to come at www.committeetobridgethegap.org.

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Check our new and improved website at

WWW.COMMITTEETOBRIDGETHEGAP.ORG

It's a great way to keep abreast of breaking developments and CBG in the news.

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50TH ANNIVERSARY OF PARTIAL REACTOR MELTDOWN IN LA

IN JULY 1959 A NUCLEAR reactor near Los Angeles suffered a partial meltdown. Coolant channels plugged up, causing fuel to overheat and a third of the fuel elements to experience melting.

Energy Commission (AEC) at the time, the public at large didn't learn about it until twenty years later, when the Committee to Bridge the Gap released government documents and film

arranging for epidemiological studies of potential health effects, and finally, trying to get the contaminated site cleaned up. The cleanup fight continues to this day.

The sorry history of what happened the last time this country embarked on a major push to build nuclear reactors is a significant warning as we face industry pressure for a revival of all things nuclear. Such a resurgence can only occur if there is a kind of nuclear amnesia about the mess that was made before.

PUBLIC HYPE, PRIVATE MELT

In November 1957, the AEC connected its Sodium Reactor Experiment (SRE) to the electric grid to briefly provide power to the town of Moorpark. Said to be the first time in the U.S. that a nuclear reactor provided electricity to a community, the AEC prevailed upon the dean of American television journalism, Edward R. Murrow, to devote an hour special of his show "See it Now" to the event.

Less than two years later, the reactor suffered one of the worst accidents in nuclear history to that date. The AEC does not appear to have come back to Mr. Murrow with the news that the reactor whose connection to the electrical grid he had helped trumpet had experienced a partial meltdown just a short time later; certainly there was no Murrow follow-up story, "Partial Meltdown in Los Angeles."

Five weeks after the accident, the AEC issued a news release stating that "a parted fuel element had been observed" and that no radioactivity had been released. In fact, the accident involved melting of the fuel elements, not "parting"; a third of the fuel elements had damage, not merely one; and radioactivity had been intentionally vented for weeks.

WHAT WAS COVERED UP 50 YEARS AGO

The SRE was sodium-cooled. Because sodium burns in the presence of air and explodes in the presence of water (a problem



Like David fighting Goliath, grassroots activists Barbara Johnson, Dawn Kowalski, Holly Huff and Marie Mason have worked with CBG for 20 years to force Boeing, DOE and NASA to clean up the contamination. Seen here at Sage Ranch Park overlooking the Santa Susana Field Lab, site of a partial meltdown in 1959. Photo: David Michel Lincoln

The reactor had no containment structure, and radioactive gases were intentionally pumped into the atmosphere for weeks.

Covered up by the Atomic

footage to the news media. Thus commenced a now-thirty-year commitment by CBG to the affected community—helping first shut the nuclear site down, then

faced by the new generation of sodium-cooled reactors current nuclear advocates propose), pumps had to be cooled with an organic substance called tetralin. Unfortunately, tetralin leaked into the sodium coolant, decomposing into globs that blocked the coolant channels. Without cooling, the fuel overheated, and uranium and the fuel cladding formed a low-melting alloy that melted.

A “power excursion” (power running out of control, increasing exponentially) resulted. Operators could barely get the reactor shut down. Then the inexplicable happened. Unable to determine what had caused the power to run out of control, the operators started the reactor up again just a couple of hours later, and continued to run it for two more weeks, in the face of rising radioactivity levels and numerous other signs something was seriously wrong.

Radiation monitors went off scale. Radioactivity had to be pumped out of the reactor vessel to holding tanks and then to the atmosphere (the SRE had no “containment” structure to try and

contain the radioactivity). Yet they kept running the damaged reactor. When finally shut down, they found severely damaged fuel.

CBG RELEASES STORY

Twenty years later, after the Three Mile Island accident, CBG began researching nuclear activities in the LA area. Alerted by a brief reference to an accident at the Atomics International facility (as it was then known) in a report by Dorothy Boberg for Another Mother for Peace, CBG researchers, including Michael Rose, then a UCLA student, obtained access to a treasure trove of government records about the event. Michael also located film footage of the inside of the melted core. The AEC didn’t disclose the truth about the accident to the public, but did make a film about the recovery of the reactor after the incident, indicating that more such accidents were likely in the future and how to deal with the aftermath would be important training for nuclear workers!

In late 1979, CBG released the material to the news mate-

rial. In particular, we provided the information and footage to Warren Olney, then heading the investigative news unit at the NBC television affiliate in LA, who ran a widely-watched special series for a week. That was the first time people in LA learned of the nuclear accident that had occurred in their midst twenty years before.

THE WORK THAT FOLLOWED—AND CONTINUES

The Santa Susana Field Lab (SSFL, its current name) housed nine other reactors, at least three of which also suffered significant accidents. There was also a plutonium fuel fabrication facility and a “hot lab” for cutting apart irradiated nuclear fuel; plus about thirty thousand rocket tests. All of these activities led to widespread radioactive and chemical contamination of the site, which is in hills overlooking Simi Valley to the north and the West San Fernando Valley to the east. Hundreds of thousands of people live nearby.

CBG and grassroots volunteers from the community, many of whom had suffered compromised

health from living close to the site, worked hard to get the nuclear site shut down, resulting in what may be the first time citizens’ opposition led to the closure of a Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear facility. We succeeded in getting independent health studies conducted, including one by UCLA that found significant increases in cancer deaths associated with workers’ exposure to radiation and chemicals at the site. Other studies suggest increased risk of certain cancers for people living nearby.

But the hardest battle has been trying to get the site cleaned up. In 2007, SB990 passed the California Legislature, mandating strict cleanup standards. But Boeing, DOE, and NASA, despite public promises to rigorously comply with the law, have instead energetically resisted compliance. As we go to press, Boeing has filed a lawsuit to overturn the law and block the cleanup it requires. The fight to get those responsible for the contamination to clean it up and our 30-year commitment to this long-suffering community continue.

CBG BLOCKS EFFORTS BY OUTGOING BUSH ADMINISTRATION TO WEAKEN RADIATION PROTECTION STANDARDS (FOR NOW....)

ON THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION’S last full day in office, Acting EPA Administrator Marcus Peacock tried to release new guidance that would have permitted radioactivity concentrations in drinking water tens of thousands of times higher than longstanding EPA rules permit. The draft Protective Action Guides (PAGs) would also have dramatically relaxed long-term cleanup requirements for contamination, allowing the public to receive radiation doses sufficient, by EPA’s own official estimates, to cause a cancer in every fourth person exposed.

The departing Bush Administration, however, was a bit slow; the new guidance was required to be published in the Federal Register, and it takes a few days for that to happen. A day or two after the Inauguration, CBG, with much help, succeeded in getting the new Obama Administration to pull the proposed guidance back from the Federal Register before it could be published, and suspend it while a new review is undertaken.

The fight is not over, however. The same staff within EPA who had

pushed these policies in the previous Administration are still trying to get them to be finalized under the new leadership.

Dan Hirsch and research assistant Jenna Marx put together a detailed report, showing radionuclide by radionuclide the astronomical increases in permissible concentrations proposed in the new PAGs. CBG assembled a group of environmental and public health groups to press the new EPA Administrator to reverse these Bush-era initiatives to weaken public protections. And in an extraordinary session at EPA headquarters in Washington, CBG’s Dan Hirsch briefed three Assistant Administrators, top Obama appointees, exposing the PAGs and a whole range of other pending proposals to weaken radiation standards carried over from the prior administration. More details, including our report, group letter, and presentation to the new senior leadership of EPA, can be found on our website, www.commmitteetobridgethegap.org.

NUCLEAR REVIVAL/NUCLEAR AMNESIA?

The biggest threat the world faces is the spread of nuclear weapons. The second biggest threat is global climate change. Advocates of nuclear power are shamelessly using the second threat to dramatically increase the risks of the first.

Nuclear power and nuclear bombs are two sides of the same coin. The spread of nuclear power technology spreads the ability, equipment, and materials necessary to make atomic bombs. You need uranium or plutonium to fuel reactors or A-bombs. To get uranium fuel for reactors you need enrichment facilities; the same facilities can enrich uranium to weapons-grade. This is the fundamental fact that has led to alarm about Iran, which says it is merely exercising its right to civilian nuclear technologies for power plants but which other countries say is simply a cover for developing nuclear weapons. To use the plutonium in irradiated nuclear fuel in reactors, one “repro-

cesses” the spent fuel and extracts the plutonium. Reprocessing can be used to obtain plutonium for bombs. This is the reason there is much concern about North Korea, which has reprocessed reactor fuel to obtain plutonium for bombs.

Nuclear power and nuclear bombs—they are inextricably linked. When you spread the former you are spreading the latter.

But the resurgence of nuclear power exposes the world to other potentially devastating risks as well. It increases the risk for catastrophic accident or terrorist attack, which can release massive amounts of radioactivity. It will produce more radioactive waste; yet the problem of safely isolating the

waste for hundreds of thousands of years is still unsolved seventy years after the first reactor waste was produced at the University of Chicago during the Manhattan Project. The immense cost of nuclear power plants would steal needed money for genuine, safe solutions: real alternatives like sun, wind and other renewables.

The nuclear industry is pushing hard for a resurgence, but it might better be called a relapse. They argue that nuclear plants produce little carbon dioxide and are thus supposedly a solution to global warming. Left out is the fact that they produce plutonium, cesium, strontium, etc., giving new meaning to the phrase “pick your

poison”—carbon dioxide or plutonium. And the nuclear industry wants billions in taxpayer subsidies to expose us to these renewed dangers, diverting essential funds from true remedies to global warming.

We are at a critical juncture in world history. There is a small window of time to take effective steps to prevent catastrophic climate change and greatly expanded nuclear proliferation. The current path pushed by the nuclear industry, if not effectively opposed, would lead irreversibly to us drowning in both carbon dioxide and plutonium—the twin disasters of more global warming and increased spread of nuclear weapons.

Bridge the Gap has been fighting hard against the efforts at a nuclear revival. See, for example, CBG’s Dan Hirsch testimony before the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee on “nuclear amnesia” at the request of Senator Barbra Boxer. You can read his statement and watch the oral testimony on CBG’s website, www.commmitteetobridgethegap.org

RADIOACTIVE WASTE: COMING TO A LOCAL (UNLICENSED) LANDFILL NEAR YOU!

THE NUCLEAR ENTERPRISE has a problem—radioactive waste. Its solution is typical—deregulate it.

Boeing, the operator of the contaminated Santa Susana Field Laboratory, a former nuclear reactor testing site near Los Angeles, is trying to dispose of its radioactive waste at the Kettleman Hills landfill in the Central Valley of California, a site neither licensed nor designed to handle such waste. That the affected community is low-income and minority only adds to the

environmental injustice Boeing’s proposed actions represent and that we are fighting.

Several years ago, Boeing tried to dump radioactive waste at a similar unlicensed site in a poor area of the Central Valley, the Buttonwillow landfill. CBG blew the whistle on that effort and, working with the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment (CRPE), we helped win a major environmental justice victory that barred any such waste at the site. Now Boeing is trying

again, this time at Kettleman.

CBG once again got wind of the plan, just before the dumping was to occur, and, with assistance from CRPE and others, has helped stop, at least for now, the plan to dump radwaste at Kettleman. We are also helping groups in the Midwest try to persuade EPA to order exhumation of radioactive waste that was illegally dumped at a landfill in St. Louis, in the floodplain of the Missouri River. But the fight isn’t over, and the nuclear industry nationally, with allies in various agencies, is trying to deregulate much radioactive waste and allow it to be disposed of in places neither licensed nor designed to safely handle it. We continue to press federal agencies to block these proposals carried over from the prior administration.

A New Look to Celebrate 40 Years

Committee to Bridge the Gap has a new logo, designed by New York graphic designer, art director and illustrator, August Heffner. Over a number of months, August worked with CBG to create a logo that is striking, fresh, and graphically “bridges” the gap. Working with a number of firms, August created work for Stephen Colbert, Martha Stewart, Nonesuch Records, and The New York City Parks Department. August also works with the Guggenheim Museum, MOMA and regularly contributes illustrations to the Op-Ed page of the New York Times.

Thank you, August, for your invaluable contribution!