

# committee to BRIDGE the GAP

## 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

- 2 Risks of Air Attacks on Reactors
- 3 Martin Sheen Narrates CBG Video on Preventing Nuclear Terrorism
  - CBG Discloses Relaxation of “Dirty Bomb” Protections
  - EPA Weakens Radiation Standards
- 4 Polluters’ Dream Ruling Reversed

<http://www.committeetobridgethegap.org>

## CANCER TOLL IN LA FROM SECRET 1959 NUCLEAR MELTDOWN

## BRIDGE THE GAP WEBSITE LAUNCHED

In 1979, Bridge the Gap helped disclose a partial meltdown of a nuclear reactor in the Los Angeles area that had been kept secret by the Atomic Energy Commission and other agencies for twenty years. That accident, in a reactor with no containment structure (the big concrete domes designed to keep radioactivity from entering the environment), occurred at an AEC reactor testing facility in the hills overlooking Simi Valley and the West San Fernando Valley. A third of the nuclear fuel experienced melting

The consequences of the accident have always been a mystery. Now a series of studies by independent scientists have been released, estimating a range of from no cancers to several thousand resulting in the LA area from the accident, with the mean (average) estimate being several hundred cancers.

The local community organized to push for the establishment of an independent panel to study health effects from the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL), now operated by the Boeing Company for the Department of Energy and other federal agencies. The SSFL Panel was established, with experts from around the world. Bridge the Gap’s Dan Hirsch

and University of North Carolina epidemiologist Steve Wing currently co-chair the Panel.

In the 1990s, the Panel oversaw studies by the UCLA School of Public Health that found increased cancer death rates among workers at the site associated with their exposures to radiation and chemicals. The Panel then promised to review potential risks to the offsite population.

A study by David Lochbaum of the Union of Concerned Scientists concluded that significant amounts of cesium-137 and iodine-131 were released from the accident. The amounts far exceed the official estimates from the Three Mile Island accident (which had a containment structure). Dr. Jan Beyea performed dispersion analyses, estimating a range of potential radiation doses and associated cancers.

The Panel released other studies showing the potential for migration by surface and ground water of contamination from decades of spills and accidents at the site. The studies were front page news in LA and picked up nationally by outlets such as AP and Newsweek Online. They can be read at [www.ssflpanel.org](http://www.ssflpanel.org). The fight to get the site cleaned up continues. Ω

With generous help from Susan Clark and Alex Karras and Michael and Gertrude Bock, Bridge the Gap has established a website, [www.committeetobridgethegap.org](http://www.committeetobridgethegap.org).

Updated frequently, it is a good way to keep up with developments in the nuclear arena and with CBG’s work.

News articles about CBG are posted regularly on the site. Reports and studies we issue can be found there as well, plus urgent action alerts on pressing regulatory matters. Those alerts let members of the public know where to submit comments.

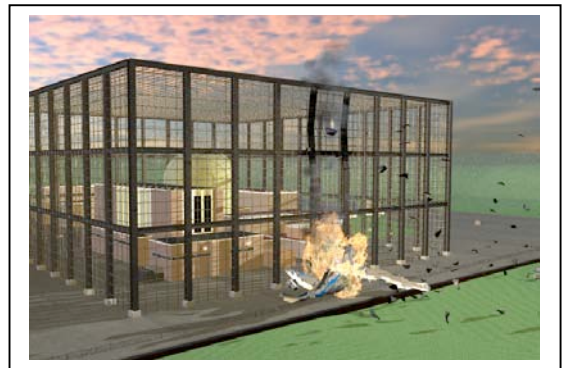
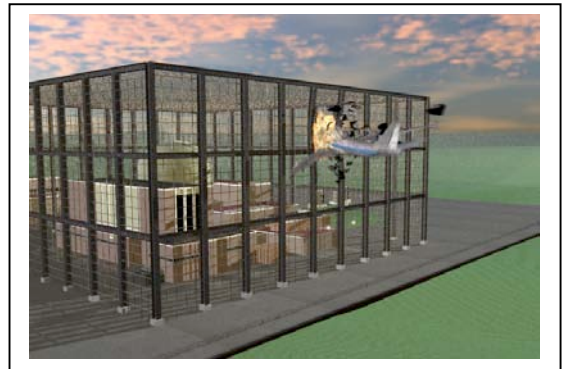
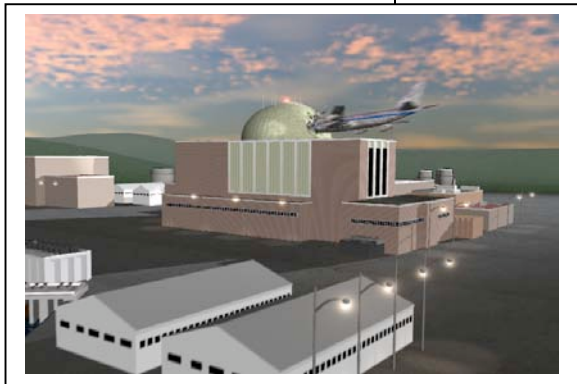
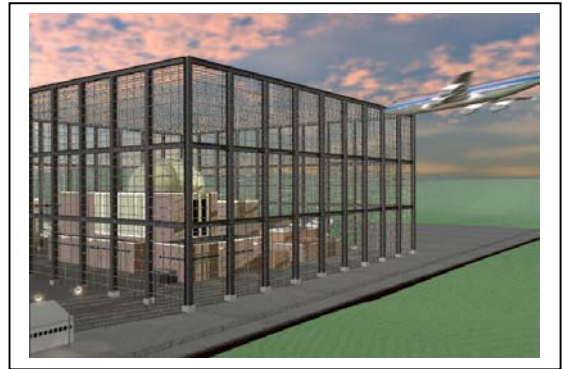
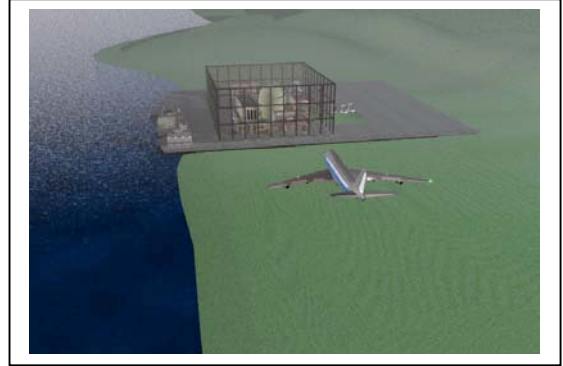
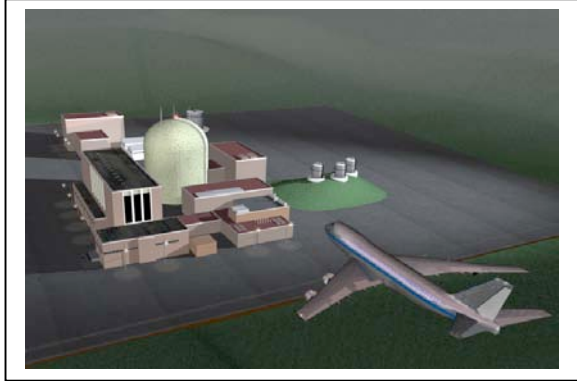
Legal briefs we file, court decisions in environmental cases in which we are involved, and important records we obtain and make public can be found on the site.

The website is also a helpful way for reporters to get access to documents we are releasing to the news media. We have posted, for example, the video CBG produced, narrated by Martin Sheen, about nuclear terrorism risks (see pages 2-3).

We are grateful to CBG’s Tony Zepeda for his service as webmaster. Joel Hirsch did much of the initial setup. We urge our supporters to log on frequently.

Ω

**AIR ATTACK ON  
UNPROTECTED  
REACTOR vs.  
PROTECTED  
REACTOR**



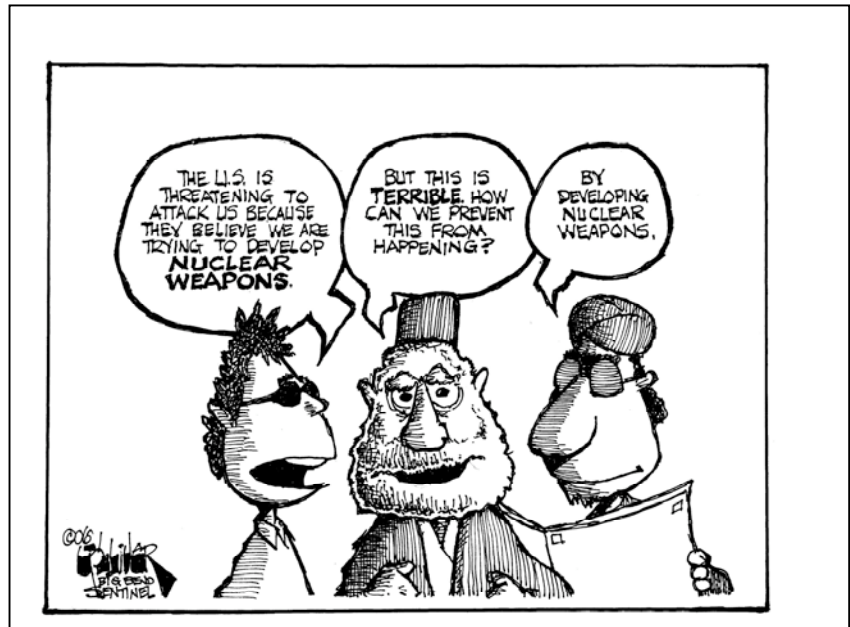
## MARTIN SHEEN NARRATES CBG VIDEO ON PREVENTING NUCLEAR TERRORISM

The risk of nuclear terrorism remains one of the pressing concerns of our time. For more than two decades Bridge the Gap has pushed for better protections of nuclear reactors from attack. U.S. reactors remain required to protect against only a small ground force, a fraction of the number of attackers seen on 9/11. And there is no protection required for attack from the air.

CBG's Joel Hirsch has proposed constructing "Beamhenge" shields around reactors so an incoming plane would hit the shield rather than the reactor, preventing a potentially catastrophic release of radioactivity. The shields, made of steel I-beams and cabling, would absorb much of the impact of a plane crash, protecting the sensitive reactor structures.

CBG has produced a short video about the current risks from our unprotected nuclear facilities and solutions for reducing the risk. Narrated by actor Martin Sheen, "President" Bartlett from the West Wing television series, with animation by Kevin Petajan of Meridian Media, and editing by Michael Rose of Michael Rose Productions. It can be viewed from CBG's new website, [www.committeetobridgethegap.org](http://www.committeetobridgethegap.org).

Stills from the video are shown on the previous page, the left column showing the risks of plane attack on a reactor with no protection, as at present, and on the right column, showing the protection from passive shields. CBG has proposed this in a rulemaking petition to the NRC, but as we go to press, NRC staff has proposed DOING NOTHING.



cartoon used by permission of Gary Oliver

### CBG DISCLOSES ADMINISTRATION EFFORTS TO RELAX "DIRTY BOMB" PROTECTIONS

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has established new guidance that would permit massive radiation doses to the public in the wake of a radiological weapon ("dirty bomb") terrorist attack, CBG has revealed. The guidance would allow radioactive contamination after such an attack to not be cleaned up, even if doses to the public would reach the equivalent of 50,000 chest X-rays.

Bridge the Gap showed that, according to the federal government's own official radiation risk figures, such doses would result in a third of the people exposed coming down with cancer from their radiation exposures. Working with the Nuclear Information and Resource Service, we got national media coverage about these callously lax standards, a significant risk to public health and safety. Ω

### POLITICIZED EPA TRIES TO WEAKEN RADIATION STANDARDS

Bridge the Gap recently revealed a remarkable example of the Bush Administration's pattern of politicizing science. After having asked the National Academy of Sciences to evaluate the health risks from radiation, and getting answers its industry friends didn't like (that radiation was more dangerous than previously thought), EPA has proposed rejecting the NAS findings and relaxing radiation risk estimates recommended by the Academy.

CBG revealed that buried in a "White Paper" by EPA's Office of Radiation and Indoor Air are recommendations to reject the Academy's conclusions. In 27 of 28 comparisons, EPA proposes to reduce the risk figures—and thus relax radiation standards—compared to what NAS recommended. Ω

## POLLUTERS' DREAM RULING REVERSED

The California Water Resources Control Board recently issued one of the most amazing environmental rulings we have ever seen, one which we eventually succeeded in reversing. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger had appointed to the Board Jerry Secundy, who had spent decades as a lawyer for the oil industry before his appointment. Secundy, Vice Chair of the Water Board, issued a decision in an appeal by the Boeing Company that was an early Christmas for polluters. The Secundy ruling, which

provoked a firestorm of outrage from elected officials and the public, directed that Boeing's pollution limits should be stayed because violating pollution rules, he said, harms the polluter but not the public.

Violations harm the polluter, according to the decision, because they could result in fines and citizens' suits. Waiving pollution rules wouldn't harm the public, he found, because Boeing would keep violating the pollution rules whether there were enforceable limits or not. So he proposed staying Boeing's pollution limits – after dozens and dozens of violations. Given the logic in the ruling, all pollution limits could be eliminated, as they can result in penalties for polluters when violated and polluters do frequently keep ignoring and violating pollution laws

because the penalties are so minimal.

We obtained an *en banc* review of the decision by the full Board, in light of the huge controversy the decision had created. And the Board overturned the potentially dangerous precedent, a nice victory.

However, as we go to press, the State Board staff has now proposed waiving Boeing's water pollution limits for 4-5 years. We are fighting this proposal. All this goes to show that agencies designed to protect the public are frequently captured by the polluting interests they are supposed to regulate. But it also shows that people organized to fight for public health can win important victories. Ω

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