



# Annual Report

2003

## COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP



### A Year of:

- Significant victories.
- Tough challenges.
- Much work ahead.

### BEAMHENGES: SHIELDING REACTORS FROM ATTACK

Two years after the 9/11 air attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the nation's nuclear reactors remain dangerously vulnerable to terrorists. Reactors are not designed to withstand the impact of a large plane. A successful attack on a nuclear plant could release a thousand times the long-lived radioactivity of the Hiroshima bomb, kill or injure tens of thousands

of people, contaminating an area the size of Pennsylvania for centuries.

Bridge the Gap has worked for two decades to improve protections at nuclear plants. The most recent approach is an innovative proposal by CBG's Joel Hirsch he calls "Beamhenge." Consisting of placing strong I-beams at offset distances from all critical reactor buildings, Beamhenge

would be a shield so that any attacking plane would crash into the shield rather than the reactor.

The shields could be constructed in a matter of months, at a fraction of 1% of the cost of constructing the reactors in the first place.

Joel's proposal was published in the May/June edition of *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. CBG is continuing its efforts to get these shields built.

### THEFTS OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS DISCLOSED: INADEQUATE PROTECTIONS AGAINST 'DIRTY BOMBS'

#### Highlights:

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Dozens of radioactive sources have been stolen in the last several years in California, Arizona, Florida, and other states, raising serious questions about the adequacy of security precautions against radiological weapons, or "dirty bombs," a CBG investigation helped disclose this year. A terrorist who stole such radioactive sources

could cause significant harm were they released in a dispersal device.

TV news stations in Los Angeles, Phoenix, Tampa, and Washington, D.C. broke the story in investigative pieces featuring CBG's Dan Hirsch. Hidden camera video revealed astonishingly lax security for these radioactive sources. Often they were left unattended in the

back of open pickup trucks, held down by a single chain that could be readily breached with a simply boltcutter.

The revelations led to hearings by a California Senate Committee, and commitments by officials to upgrade security. Bridge the Gap will be closely monitoring actions to see if these promises, so critical to public safety, are kept.



# RADIOACTIVE SPOONS AND ZIPPERS



The Bush Administration is proposing to **deregulate radioactive waste**. Under the plans, which CBG has helped disclose and fight, radioactively contaminated metals from old reactors and nuclear weapons facilities could be sold as scrap, where they would end up in the consumer metal supply.

**Everything from spoons and zippers, to baby toys and children's braces, could thus be made out of these radioactive wastes.** They are also proposing to permit free release of other radioactive wastes,

so that they could end up in schools, farms, parks.

Bridge the Gap helped get the story out through outlets such as AP and the Washington Post and is helping organize national opposition to these dangerous proposals. Senator Feinstein recently issued a press release attacking the radioactive waste deregulation efforts. Legislation CBG sponsored in Sacramento would ban the practice in California. Last year it passed the Legislature, only to be vetoed by Gov. Davis. The fight continues.

# HOT LANDFILLS

Bridge the Gap released government data showing that **22 of 50 municipal landfills tested had elevated radioactivity** in their leachate and/or groundwater. The story, which received significant coverage in papers such as the Los Angeles Times and Sacramento Bee, revealed that radioactive wastes - which are supposed to go to

licensed radioactive waste disposal sites, have in fact been dumped in local regular garbage dumps not designed for such wastes.

The revelations formed the core of California Senate hearings at which CBG's Dan Hirsch was a key witness.

Last year, CBG—ably represented by Larry

Silver -- **won a landmark lawsuit overturning state regulations that would have permitted routine disposal of radioactive wastes in regular landfills.** Legislation sponsored by CBG barring the practice passed the Legislature last year; although vetoed, the **Governor was forced to announce a moratorium on such dumping.**

# RADIATION RISKS

CBG continues to fight nuclear industry efforts to relax already weak radiation protection standards. Dr. Richard Saxon and Dan Hirsch, in an invited paper before

the Conference of Radiation Control Protection Directors, revealed that current regulations setting occupational radiation limits of 5000 millirem per year (equivalent to

about 1000 chest Xrays) permit lifetime exposures sufficient to **cause a fatal cancer in an astonishing 1 in 8 workers exposed,** using the regulatory agencies' own official risk figures.



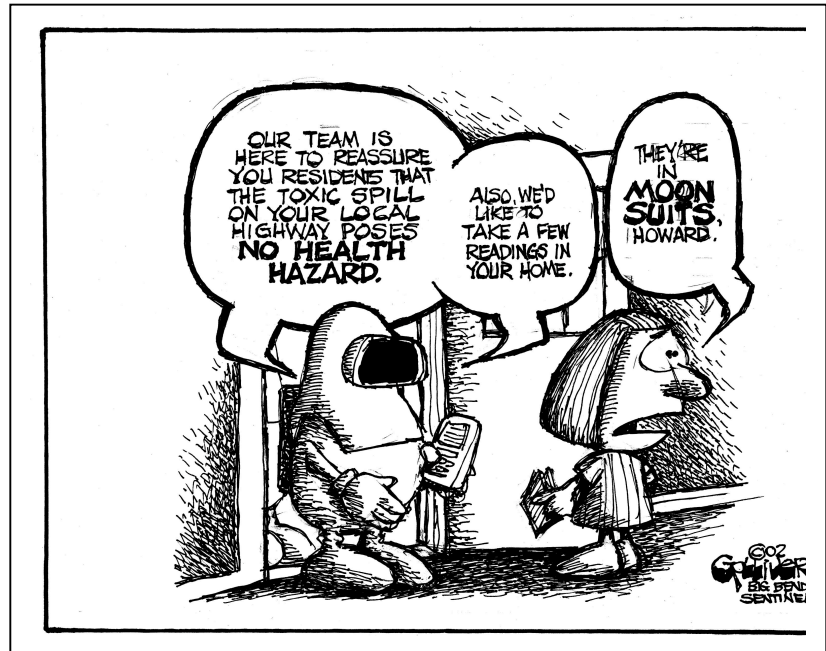
# NUCLEAR CLEANUP

Bridge the Gap continues to fight efforts to relax cleanup standards for contaminated nuclear sites. **Last year we won a precedent-setting lawsuit** knocking down state regulations that would have permitted unacceptably high levels of radioactivity to remain at former nuclear facilities released for unrestricted use.

The Bush Administration recently broke long-standing federal policy requiring that the more protective EPA cleanup

standards be used in remediating Department of Energy nuclear sites. CBG helped expose the policy shift and continues to organize efforts to reverse it.

The issue is a real life-and-death matter. The new standards, if permitted to stand, would permit **thousands of times more radioactivity to be left behind at dirty nuclear installations** than before and then the sites released for unrestricted residential use.



Special Thanks to Gary Oliver for use of his cartoons

# DOE/Boeing/Rocketdyne Fight

25 years ago, Bridge the Gap disclosed that a **partial meltdown of a reactor** had occurred in the Santa Susana mountains at the Los Angeles/Ventura County boundary in 1959. The Atomic Energy Commission (now Dept. of Energy) kept the accident secret for decades.

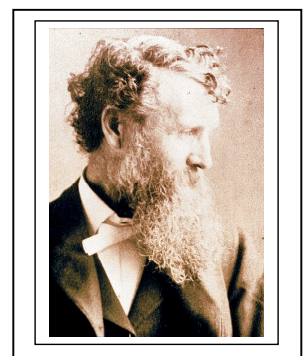
Since then, we have fought for full cleanup of the site - operated by the Rocketdyne Division of Boeing - which tested a dozen reactors and large numbers of rockets. It has extensive radioactive

and chemical contamination from **decades of spills, releases, and accidents.**

CBG helped disclose that perchlorate from the site appears to have migrated miles off the property and contaminated numerous wells in Simi Valley. Other wells in the vicinity have also been found with the pollutant, including at a nearby children's camp and a proposed massive development at the Ahmanson Ranch. CBG's disclosure of the perchlorate findings

contributed to the proponents of that development abandoning their plans and agreeing to sell the land for open space, an important conservation victory for the area.

The Rocketdyne site is physically gorgeous, yet damaged by widespread contamination. **Those responsible for the environmental damage are strenuously resisting cleaning it up;** we are strenuously fighting to require that those who made the mess repair it rather than perpetuate it.



*What would John Muir have thought of all this?*



## COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP

1637 Butler Ave.  
Suite 203  
Los Angeles  
California 90025



Phone:  
(310) 478-0829

Fax:  
(310) 478-0820

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Contributions are  
tax-deductible.

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Committee to Bridge the Gap  
1637 Butler Avenue, Suite 203  
Los Angeles, California 90025

address service requested

## Ward Valley

For more than a decade, Bridge the Gap fought a dangerous proposal to dump radioactive wastes in unlined trenches near the Colorado River at Ward Valley. Last year, the state adopted a new law permanently barring the project from going forward, while setting more protective

requirements for any future project. CBG also helped defeat a court challenge by US Ecology to revive the project.

Late last year, a process server showed up in our office with a subpoena from US Ecology, **demanding every communication we've ever had with any**

**federal agency on any radioactive waste topic since we were founded - more than 30 years ago!** It took several months and thousands of dollars to successfully fight the subpoena, which is why last year's annual mailing was abbreviated and we summarize here some of that year's activities in addition to this year's.

## Proliferation and Nuclear Security

For two decades CBG has pushed for **reduction in world commerce and use of highly enriched uranium (HEU)**, which can be diverted for nuclear weapons purposes. We succeeded a decade ago in getting federal regulations adopted requiring the use

of low-enriched fuels that can't be used for weapons purposes. We continue that work in the face of recent efforts to relax those restrictions.

Additionally, for 20 years we have fought to get the NRC to increase security requirements for nuclear

facilities, in particular increasing the number of attackers that reactor operators must be capable of defending against. **NRC has finally amended those rules, marginally upgrading the requirements.** We continue to push for more adequate protections.

## About Committee to Bridge the Gap...

Founded in 1970, Bridge the Gap is a non-profit public interest organization focused on peace and environmental questions, with a primary emphasis on nuclear issues. We survive with your support.

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