



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

Winter 2021 Newsletter

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CLIMATE CHANGE STRIKES HOME

Last year, enormous lightning storms ignited the massive CZU Lightning Fire in drought-fueled bone-dry vegetation in the mountains surrounding CBG's headquarters in Ben Lomond. We were evacuated for a month. When finally allowed to return, the house was standing, but we found the fire had gotten within 1 foot of the outbuildings that store CBG's files. A great many people were not so lucky.

Twice since then we have been ordered to evacuate again because of the risk of debris flows and mudslides during heavy rains on nearby damaged slopes. Both times we returned to find things undamaged.

In February of this year, an immense wind storm broke off a huge redwood tree and sent it like a javelin hurtling through the roof of one of the buildings that stores our files and out the front door. The tree crunched file cabinets filled with documents from our long, successful struggle to block the proposed Ward Valley nuclear waste dump that could have contaminated the Colorado River for a thousand generations. CBG Board Member Ron Pomerantz and longtime friend Eric Welty (who had built two of the outbuildings) quickly came and cut away the tree and then repaired the building; Ron carefully cut into the file cabinets to free the precious documents.

Fire, flood, and wind—all driven by climate change, came close to destroying CBG's home. The near-misses are metaphors for the warnings we all should heed, that if extraordinary steps aren't taken now to stop extracting and burning fossil fuels and pumping huge quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, disaster will strike us all. And because carbon dioxide stays in the atmosphere for centuries, the increasing injury we are doing to the planet will be for all practical purposes permanent.



CBG's damaged storage building

Bridge the Gap has dedicated most of its 50+ years to fighting the existential threat of nuclear weapons and the connected risks of nuclear waste, proliferation, terrorism, and accidents. We will continue to do so, as you will see elsewhere in this newsletter. But we now also take up the battle against the other great existential threat: climate change.

This year we have had a project aimed at trying to stimulate efforts on the ground in West Virginia in support of strong renewable energy measures that need to be included in federal infrastructure legislation. We have done this knowing that the future of U.S. climate change efforts comes down to a Senator from that state who has been blocking such efforts. In light of the ineffective outcome from the Glasgow World Summit on Climate, we all now need to do everything possible to reduce the scope of the pending global catastrophe.

The nuclear industry has shamelessly tried to rebrand itself as a solution to climate change. But as Dan Hirsch and the now deceased Dave Freeman wrote in a Sacramento Bee OpEd some years ago, the choice is not between plutonium

'Climate Change' continued on page 2



EXPLOSIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN SANTA SUSANA FIELD LAB CLEANUP FIGHT

More than forty years ago we brought to light a partial nuclear meltdown that occurred in the LA area and had long been kept secret.

Numerous other reactor accidents and tens of thousands of rocket tests created widespread radioactive and toxic chemical contamination, which has been migrating offsite. We have worked ever since to try to get the site cleaned up, in order to help protect the 700,000 people who live within ten miles.

It has been a tough fight, because the parties responsible for the contamination—the Boeing Company, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), and NASA—and the state regulator, the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), have repeatedly breached the legally binding cleanup agreements they signed. Those agreements required soil cleanup be completed by 2017. As we approach the end of 2021, the promised soil cleanup hasn't even begun. Instead, the Responsible Parties and DTSC seem to be actively working to make matters worse.

On October 1, DOE—with DTSC approval—blew

up, with explosives, their last remaining buildings in the nuclear area of SSFL. It is hard to describe how idiotic this is. The buildings had been identified by the US EPA as “Class 1,” i.e., having the highest probability of containing radioactive contamination. DOE and DTSC had agreed that the debris from the demolition had to be disposed of in a licensed radioactive waste disposal facility. Yet they blew the buildings up, tossing huge amounts of dust into the air.

DOE was required to use “water cannons to create a curtain of water” to contain the dust, but didn't even do that. It was as though they were intentionally trying to make matters worse. NBC-LA did a major story about the blowing up of the buildings, in which we appear.

Additionally, there was substantial news coverage of a study recently published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal showing that radioactive contamination from SSFL migrated at least 9 miles off-

site from the Woolsey Fire in 2018. DTSC had denied that there were any releases from the fire. Of course, if DTSC had met the obligations for cleanup to be completed by 2017, there wouldn't have been the risk of contamination migrating thereafter.

DTSC & Boeing have been in secret negotiations all year to let Boeing out of its

cleanup obligations. DOE & NASA similarly have worked hard to breach their cleanup agreements. We made a promise years ago to the community to try to help; the irony is not lost on us that we are working hard to keep our promises while those responsible for the contamination are working energetically to break theirs.

CLIMATE CHANGE - CONTINUED

and carbon; it is between plutonium and carbon on the one hand and the sun on the other. Every dollar spent on nuclear is a dollar stolen from the real solution, renewables. And every day reactors operate, more radioactive waste dangerous for half a million years is produced. We have been working hard to oppose measures that would divert funding from solar and wind to propping up unsafe nuclear plants that can't economically compete with renewables.



CBG's smashed file cabinets

Nuclear Waste: Victories & Challenges

THE NUCLEAR REGULATORY Commission quietly proposed, in the midst of the pandemic, to deregulate virtually all radioactive waste other than irradiated nuclear fuel, and allow it to be disposed of in regular municipal garbage dumps designed for rotting cabbages, not plutonium. We fought this hard, working with sister organizations, and, remarkably, won. The NRC withdrew the proposal in the face of overwhelming opposition.

Similarly, in the last days of the Trump Administration, the EPA Administrator issued a letter essentially overturning a longstanding regulation forbidding the use of radioactive waste from phosphate mining to be used to construct roads. Such wastes contain high levels of radium and other radioisotopes. We provided the technical analysis, working with the Center for Biological Diversity and others, that successfully got

this decision reversed a few months ago.

We also played a major role in a recent CNN Español documentary disclosing that for years radioactive “reject” rock from phosphate mining had been used in parks, playgrounds, and driveways in Florida despite high radiation readings.

Dan Hirsch was asked by a committee of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to make a presentation on the long history of the Atomic Energy Commission and Department of Energy suppressing radiation studies that showed harm to workers and the public. His presentation, available on the CBG website, focused on grossly non-protective standards for “allowable” radiation.

We also helped disclose problems with nuclear waste storage at Los Alamos, which had mixed radioactivity with reactive chemicals creating an explosion risk

so great they believe they can’t move the waste. Indeed, radioactive waste from Los Alamos had blown up at the Waste Isolation Pilot Project because—if you can believe this—they had added kitty litter to the waste to absorb liquids, which when combined with other chemicals, exploded.

We continue to work in opposition to proposals for “Centralized Interim Storage” of the nation’s high level

nuclear waste in communities of color in Texas or New Mexico. We have instituted a major new CBG project to propose a technically defensible path forward for a new siting process for permanent waste repositories. The irradiated fuel rods are degrading, the nuclear waste is dangerous for immense periods of time. There is a responsibility to future generations to get this right.



MSNBC AIRS IN THE DARK OF THE VALLEY

The superb new documentary about the Santa Susana Field Lab featuring Melissa Bumstead of Parents against SSFL, Denise Duffield of PSR and CBG’s Dan Hirsch premiered last spring. After winning several top awards at film festivals, it was acquired by MSNBC where it was aired nationally in November. We are hopeful that the increased public scrutiny will help move the needle toward a full SSFL cleanup.

HUNTERS POINT: THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE BROUGHT HOME

THE FIRST POST-WAR ATOMIC BOMB TESTS WERE conducted in the Bikini Atoll in 1946, contaminating scores of naval vessels. They were brought to Hunters Point in San Francisco, then as now a low-income community of color, where the radioactivity was sandblasted off the ships, contaminating the area, which is now a Superfund Site. We have worked for the last six years trying to help this environmental justice community get the site cleaned up.

We helped disclose that the EPA found that the Navy’s contractor had allegedly falsified radioactivity measurements in 90-97% of survey units at Hunters Point. This has triggered retesting by the Navy. We disclosed, however, that much of the retesting being done is as questionable as the original measurements. For example, the Navy has been taking measurements for “background” in the midst of the

contaminated site, a violation of fundamental principles of such surveys. Background is the level of radioactivity that would exist from fallout or natural radioactivity had the shipyard never been contaminated, and you are never to take such measurements in areas that could be contaminated. This, if not reversed, can only have the effect of not cleaning up areas that are in fact polluted.

In August, we briefed Carlton Waterhouse, the new EPA Deputy Assistant Administrator in charge of Superfund cleanups nationally. We outlined a long series of failures both by the Navy and EPA and called on him to personally intervene and get the cleanup back on track.

We have discovered some major new scandals about the botched Hunters Point cleanup and are working on new reports to disclose them; stay tuned.



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CBG LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

After 50 years of fighting for a safe, sustainable future, CBG is not looking back. The struggle continues. One of the most important (and satisfying) roles that CBG plays is training a new generation of committed activists. From that group, some go on to join the CBG staff.

Alex Dodd, was a CBG intern in the Spring of 2021, and has recently joined the staff of CBG. Working for CBG has changed the way he looks at environmental work: "Since joining CBG, I have come to understand the importance of advocating for communities near current and former nuclear sites. The general momentum of government agencies is towards cutting costs and circumventing best practices, which puts people at risk. It has been a privilege to work with CBG and play a crucial role in holding polluters accountable."

Nicolas Snyder joined the staff of CBG in 2020, after his internship. He says: "Proper oversight over regulatory agencies and corporate commitments is essential to protect public health and the environment. Failure can have tragic consequences. I am proud to take greater responsibility as a staff member and assist where I can."

Help us continue the Good Fight – Donate now!

CBG is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization—donations are tax-deductible.
Send a check using the enclosed donation envelope or give online at committeetobridgethegap.org

Questions?

Call (831) 336-8003 or email committeetobridgethegap@gmail.com for more information

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