

Exploring Whether a Nuclear Disaster is Possible in the Tri-state Area

by Jane Califf, Green Party of Essex / Passaic Co.

Could a nuclear disaster happen in New Jersey? After all, we have four nuclear power plants producing electricity:

Oyster Creek along the southern Atlantic coast off Barnegat Bay in Ocean County – the oldest power plant of all the 104 in the U.S., and the same General Electric model as the Fukushima plant in Japan that suffered catastrophic failure after the earthquake and tsunami last March. It is such an old model that it would never be permitted to be built today.



Oyster Creek Nuclear Plant

Salem 1, Salem 2 and Hope Creek on an artificial island in southern NJ along the Delaware River in Salem County—one of them the same model as Fukushima.

Then there are the two **Indian Point** nuclear plants 25 miles north of New York City in Buchanan, NY in Westchester County that sit over an earthquake fault line. 21 million people in 4 states live within 50 miles of this plant.

In order to explore what nuclear dangers we could face in NJ and what to do about them, the Green Party of Essex and Passaic Counties and co-sponsor NJ Peace Action held a well-attended public meeting in the Montclair Public Library on May 12th. Three experts gave presentations followed by a question and answer period.

This article will cover some of the main points raised and include information from other sources.

Lack of Serious Regulation of U.S. Nuclear Plants

Richard Webster, environmental attorney at Public Justice in Washington, DC, is the lawyer for NJ citizens' groups challenging in court the recent relicensing of the Oyster Creek plant by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). He said that his "primary position is that nuclear power needs to be well-regulated, and we can then determine whether it can compete in the market place." However, he pointed out that the federal government is doing a "terrible job" of regulating these power plants.

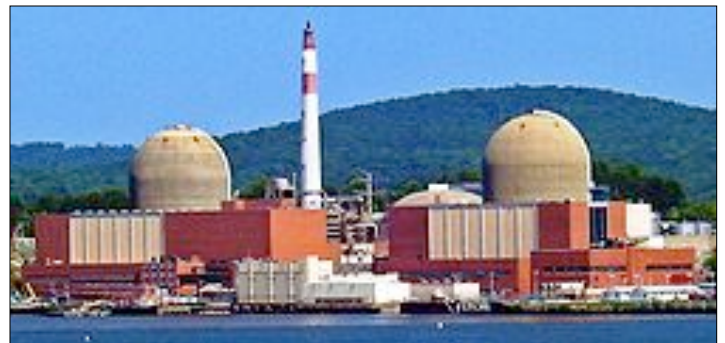


Two Examples from Oyster Creek:

- The containment building that is supposed to keep radiation from leaking out in case of a nuclear accident is badly corroded—now only half as thick as it was when it was first built 41 years ago.
- Radioactive tritium leaked from holes in 2 pipes threatening an enormous aquifer that supplies much of South Jersey's drinking water. The NRC investigated and did nothing even though it is believed that 180,000 gallons of contaminated water were released with levels of tritium 50 times higher than NJ standards. (The state stepped in and has ordered the Exelon Corp. that runs the plant to come up with a plan to keep it from spreading.)

Marilyn Elie of the Westchester Citizen Awareness Network gave convincing instances of poor regulation at Indian Point. One example: two of the Fukushima, Japan plants are similar to Indian Point in that highly radioactive waste is stored on site – 1,000 tons at Indian Point in 40 feet of cool water to prevent a meltdown. (This is common because the nuclear industry can't find communities willing to bury it in their vicinity.)

continued



Indian Point Nuclear Plant

This waste at Indian Point is kept in flimsy containers, and if an accident occurs, they do not have any back-up batteries to keep the pumps bringing in cool water. The waste could then overheat and cause a radioactive meltdown spewing deadly radiation far and wide in the tri-state area as is now happening in Japan and spreading around the world.

A recent *New York Times* article explained that critics of the NRC attribute this lack of regulation to the fact that administrators are too close to the nuclear industry. When they leave the NRC, there is a promise of a well-paying job in the nuclear field, so to keep this option alive, they almost always go along with whatever nuclear corporations demand.

Other Problems

Sid Goodman, engineer and author of *Asleep at the Geiger Counter: Nuclear Destruction of the Planet and How to Save It*, documents shocking information of NRC lies, rigged studies, scientists who are muzzled, and the suppression of scientific evidence that no level of radiation is completely safe.

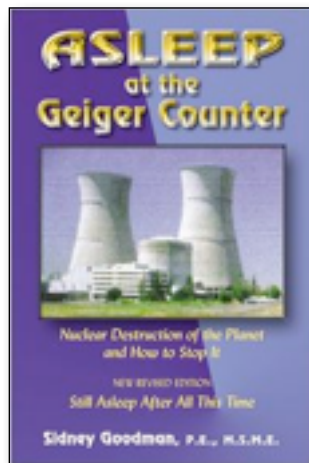
- Nuclear plants take in billions of gallons of cool water each week from rivers and bays and discharge water that is 30 – 40degrees hotter, killing fish and plant life.

- Billions of fish and hatchlings are sucked up into a nuclear plant's intake system, are killed and dumped back into rivers and bays. The National Marine Fisheries say this process is a primary contributing factor to failing fish stocks.

- Due to routine radioactive releases, there are higher cancer rates near nuclear plants, and since these radioactive particles can travel far, they threaten our health.

- The Price / Anderson Act says that in case of accident, nuclear companies will never pay more than \$10 – 12 billion for clean-up when the costs would be up to \$1 trillion! The American Taxpayer would pick up the tab!

- There is no safe escape route. The NRC only mandates a 10 mile evacuation zone even though it recommended that Japan increase this to 50 miles.



Solutions

Instead of giving billions of our tax dollars to subsidize nuclear, coal, oil and gas, which are polluting our planet and threatening our future, we need massive investments in clean energy sources like solar and wind. These do not pollute or contribute to the heating of our planet which is causing climate instability; they will provide millions of desperately needed jobs.

In addition, Mr. Goodman says that we can dramatically cut our energy usage by using tax dollars to subsidize making our homes and buildings more energy efficient which "... can give us four times more energy than all our nuclear plants at one-twentieth the cost of building and operating them."

The Township of Berkeley near the Oyster Creek Plant recently passed a resolution calling for this facility to shut down before its 2019 closing date. Other towns could pass similar resolutions that should also include retraining of plant workers for clean energy jobs.

Where would the money come from for such solutions? The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have cost the American people over \$1 trillion. Ending them and using our tax dollars to help our broken economy and environment would be a wonderful step forward.

For more information on problems and solutions to our energy crises, these websites can be useful:

Mr. Goodman's: elsidsgreenspace.com;

Indian Point Safe Energy Coalition: www.ipsecinfo.org;

www.350.org;

www.beyondnuclear.org.

Google: *Jersey Shore Nuclear Watch*. ☺

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