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Fukushima, One Year Later. Nuclear Power and the Big Lie

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As the first anniversary of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster arrives, the cover-up involving nuclear power is more extensive than ever.

The Big Lie was integral to the nuclear push from its start.

Promoters of nuclear power discounted the seriousness of nuclear plant accidents, although government documents acknowledged the vast scale of catastrophe. As the Atomic Energy Commission's "WASH-740 update," done at Brookhaven National Laboratory in the 1960s, repeatedly states about a major nuclear plant accident: "The possible size of the area of such a disaster might be equal to that of the State of Pennsylvania."

They pushed the "peaceful atom"—although knowing that any nation with a nuclear plant would have the material from it (the plutonium produced as a byproduct) and trained personnel to make atomic weapons.

They downplayed the effects of radioactivity claiming it needed to reach a "threshold" to cause harm—even as it became clear that any amount of radioactivity can injure and kill.

And nuclear power would be "too cheap to meter," they insisted.

And on and on...

The realities of nuclear power have become ever more evident—acutely so because of the disasters at Chernobyl and Fukushima.

But the Nuclear Big Lie continues bigger than ever.

In recent weeks, for example, there's been the move to negate what has been the U.S. government's benchmark analysis on the impacts of nuclear plant accidents. "Calculation Reactor Accident Consequences 2" (CRAC-2) was done for the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission by the U.S. Department of Energy's Sandia National Laboratories in 1982. It catalogues the impacts from a meltdown with a breach of containment at every nuclear plant in the U.S.

It divides the consequences into "Peak Early Fatalities," "Peak Early Injuries," "Peak Cancer Deaths" and "Scaled Costs" for property damage—and the numbers are chilling.

For the Indian Point 3 nuclear plant north of New York City, for instance, it projects "Peak Early Fatalities" at 50,000, "Peak Early Injuries" at 167,000, "Peak Cancer Deaths" at 14,000 and "Scaled Costs" at \$314 billion (in 1980 dollars).

The estimates turn out to be low considering the toll of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear plant accident.

But in January, the NRC put out a report that it intends to replace CRAC-2 with that it titles the "State-of-the-Art Reactor Consequences Analyses" or SOARCA. SOARCA flatly dismisses the high casualty and damage figures of CRAC-2 (and the WASH-740 update before it). Using as models the Surry nuclear station in Virginia and the Peach Bottom facility in Pennsylvania, each with two nuclear plants, the NRC declared that the "risks of public health consequences from severe accidents" at a nuclear plant "are very small."

The "long-term risk" of a person dying from cancer from a nuclear plant accident is less than one-in-a billion, says SOARCA. This is because "successful implementation of existing mitigation measures can prevent reactor core damage or delay or reduce offsite releases of radioactive material."

Tell that to the people impacted by Chernobyl and Fukushima.

Cindy Folkers of the organization Beyond Nuclear declares that the "NRC should immediately withdraw its absurd SOARCA report and get about the business of protecting the public health, safety, and the environment—its mandate—rather than doing the nuclear power industry's bidding."

Then there's the attempt to cover up Fukushima impacts.

"Health impacts from the radioactive materials released in the Fukushima Daiichi meltdowns will probably be too small to be easily measured," began a *New York Times* piece by Matthew Wald last week. That was based on a Health Physics Society program at the National Press Club.

But the Health Physics Society is a booster of nuclear technology. It wasn't supposed to be that. The health physics profession was founded in 1943 by Karl Z. Morgan, a physicist with an interest in the health effects of radioactivity. He was hired by the Manhattan Project, the World War II crash program to build atomic bombs, to deal with health issues caused by radioactivity at the project. Then, for more than two decades, he was director of health physics at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. He was the first president of the Health Physics Society. And he saw and protested the profession selling out.

"It is with much reluctance and regret that I now must recognize that the U.S. profession of health physics has become essentially a labor union for the nuclear industry—not a profession of scientists dedicated to protect the worker and members of the public from radiation injury," Dr. Morgan wrote in 1992.

The radioactivity that has fallen in Japan for many months from Fukushima will have enormous consequences to the people of Japan. The type of accident that occurred at Fukushima Daiichi was "something that never happened—a multiple reactor catastrophe...happening within 200 kilometers of 30 million people," notes Dr. Alexey Yablokov, lead author of *Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment*. Dr. Yablokov, a biologist, and two other scientists, in the 2009 book, published by the New York Academy of Sciences, find that 985,000 people died between 1986, the year of the Chernobyl accident, and 2004 from the radioactivity it released. He projects the Fukushima toll will be greater.

"The Fukushima disaster will be worse than Chernobyl," agrees Dr. Janette Sherman, toxicologist and editor of the *Chernobyl book*. She also points to the Fukushima disaster involving several nuclear plants along with spent fuel pools affecting a part of Japan "far more populated" than the region around Chernobyl.

Fukushima fall-out has already caused death in the U.S., Dr. Sherman and epidemiologist Joseph

Mangano of the Radiation and Public Health Project have determined.

Dr. Sherman and Mangano cross-checked data on infant mortality from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention with records of Fukushima fallout from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and found that infant mortality spiked by an average of 35 percent in eight cities west of the Rocky Mountains, including San Francisco and Seattle, and by 48 percent in Philadelphia during the ten weeks after the accident began on March 11, 2011.

Infant mortality—defined as death of children from birth to one year old—is considered an early measure of radiation effects because there is rapid growth and cell division at this stage, increasing the impacts of radioactivity. Cancer is a subsequent consequence.

“A global increase in cancer can be expected from the Fukushima discharges,” says Dr. Sherman, who has been an advisor to the National Cancer Institute and has studied the impacts of radiation since working for the Atomic Energy Commission in the 1950s.

Besides blowing in the wind, the radioactive poisons from Fukushima have been spread in food, which is why several countries have restricted food imports from Japan.

Moreover, the sea along the Fukushima site provides a vast pathway for spreading radioactivity. When radioactive poison gets into the marine environment a “concentration factor” kicks in as the radiation moves up the food chain. Small fish eat radiation-contaminated seaweed, and medium-size fish eat the small fish. Then big fish eat the medium-size fish and radioactivity becomes increasingly concentrated. Some of the fish are migratory, so it’s not just sushi in Tokyo that’s imperiled.

Meanwhile, the Nuclear Energy Institute, the nuclear industry trade group, continues to insist: “No health effects are expected among the Japanese people as a result of the events at Fukushima.” The American Nuclear Society proclaims on its website that “no public ill effects are expected from the Fukushima incident.”

Mangano says that “the absurd belief that no one will be harmed by Fukushima is perhaps the strongest evidence of the pattern of deception and denial by nuclear officials in industry and government.”

Further, last May 3, after doing at least weekly monitoring of radioactivity providing the data that Dr. Sherman and Mangano linked to infant mortality, the EPA announced it would only gather readings every three months. Jeff Ruch, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, described it as “inexplicable that EPA would shut down its radiation monitoring effort” while Fukushima discharges continued to fall on the U.S.

Inexplicable, but in line, says Dr. Jeffrey Patterson, immediate past president of Physicians for Social Responsibility, with the “cover-up, a minimization of the effects of radioactivity, since the development of nuclear weapons and nuclear technology.”

Here and there, there’s been a break through the Fukushima cover-up—such the PBS television *Frontline* program, *Inside Japan’s Nuclear Meltdown*, that aired last week with an interview with former Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan in which he acknowledged that Japanese officials considered at one point an evacuation of the greater Tokyo area with its 30 million people. The *New York Times*, in a Page One story last week, also reported this based not on its own investigative work but on a six-month inquiry by the Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation that resulted in a 400-page report.

Yes, as WASH-740-update said decades ago, the scale of a major nuclear plant accident “might be

equal to that of the State of Pennsylvania.”

Another part of the cover-up since Fukushima has been the claim that there is no alternative to nuclear power. As Miranda Spencer wrote in last May’s issue of *Extra!* magazine, with the Fukushima disaster “U.S. government and nuclear industry spin control kicked in, asserting that a similar disaster couldn’t happen here, and that atomic power is here to stay...An option hardly mentioned: renewable energy, such as wind, solar and geothermal power.”

This is especially important for the nuclear establishment because, as Spencer pointed out, “wind is already cheaper per kilowatt-hour than nuclear” and “the National Research Council estimates that by 2020, the cost of geothermal will be comparable to or lower than that of nuclear (10 cents/kwh versus 6-13 cents/kwh). Solar power, which the Council said “could potentially produce many times the current and projected future U.S. electricity consumption,” is projected to cost anywhere from 8-30 cents/kwh. Also, “A Duke University study found that the cost of solar power has not only recently declined by half, but also is poised to become cheaper than nuclear, even in places that aren’t always sunny.” The claims, she accurately wrote, that safe, clean, renewable power is not here to substitute for atomic energy “simply don’t stand up to scrutiny.”

But “the story that emerged accordingly presented nuclear energy as a path with no real alternatives.” This is despite Germany, Italy, Switzerland and other nations deciding, because of Fukushima, to pursue safe, clean, renewable power instead of nuclear power. It can be done.

“Renewable Energy Can Power the World, Says Landmark IPCC Study,” headlined the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, also in May. It went on: “UN’s climate change science body says renewable supply, particularly solar power, can meet global demand.” The article, about a 1,000-page report of the United Nation’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, added, however, that this is “only if governments pursue the policies needed to promote green power.”

An especially grisly angle was taken in last week’s *Economist* magazine. In an article titled “Radiation and evolution, Surviving fallout,” it reported on a study on birds around Chernobyl and Fukushima. “When researchers looked at the 14 bird species that lived in both regions, they found that the same level of radiation was associated with twice as large a drop in bird numbers in Fukushima as in Chernobyl.”

The *Economist* said that Dr. Timothy Mousseau, professor of biological sciences at the University of South Carolina, co-author of the study published in *Environmental Pollution*, believes a “likely explanation is that evolution has already been at work near Chernobyl, killing off individual birds that cannot cope with the background radiation and allowing the genes of those that have some tolerance to be passed on. The birds at Fukushima are only beginning to face the evolutionary challenge of living in a radioactive world.”

Does this point to the consequence of living in “a radioactive world” the elimination of huge numbers of people—with the more radiation-tolerant humans the survivors? Is this what we want? And is there no choice but to live in “a radioactive world.”

Nobel Award-winning biologist Dr. George Wald once said of nuclear power: “If you were to read in the newspapers tomorrow that astronomers had a shocking piece of information for us, they had just found another star is going to collide with the sun and that would be curtains, we’d have eight months more to go and, finished—why—heavens above! You would put on your best clothes and go dancing in the streets—that’s cosmic, that’s fate. You could go out with dignity.” But to die as a result of nuclear power, he said, “is so trivial, it’s so ghastly ignoble as to be, I think, intolerable, altogether unacceptable.” And he called for “the closing down of all nuclear power plants

tomorrow.”

That’s more relevant—and urgent—than ever.

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P.S.

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