

BLUE RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE LEAGUE

www.BREDL.org PO BOX 88 Glendale Springs, North Carolina 28629 BREDL@skybest.com (336) 982-2691

Statements from representatives of organizations BREDL press conference on dangers and risks regarding transportation of high level nuclear waste across Carolinas May 22, 2007

“The Global Nuclear Energy Partnership as outlined by the United States Department of Energy is yet another jerry-rigged scheme to jump-start the nuclear industry. It is a Rube Goldberg assemblage of warmed over ideas and half-baked notions which will provide neither energy security nor clean power. President Bush’s so-called Advanced Energy Initiative if implemented would be a giant leap backwards into the nuclear technology of the 20th Century.

As indicated in the report published today by John Sticpewich, nuclear waste transport across our highways and railways would place at risk that which we hold most dear: our families, our friends and our communities. The report lists nuclear power plants in 17 states from which nuclear waste shipments would pass en route to Savannah River. From 2,146 to 4,498 shipments would likely pass through the Charlotte-Rock Hill area on Interstate 77. How then can energy security be enhanced by the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership? It cannot.

And waste transportation would not be the only drawback. A return to nuclear power plant construction—near Gaffney, South Carolina or near Winston-Salem, North Carolina—would add new sources of nuclear waste bound for Savannah River, Barnwell or some other place. More waste to put more people at risk for many more years.

Finally, the false promise of clean power is the lie upon which the entire Global Nuclear Energy Partnership is predicated. According to today’s report: “Except for the richest sources of ore, the whole process of uranium preparation and disposal ends up as an energy negative.” In other words, in the 21st Century no electric power—none—will be gained by building and operating nuclear reactors.

The National Academies of Science have stated quite clearly that the social and institutional challenges of nuclear waste transport have not been resolved. Foremost among these challenges is the threat of sabotage and other malevolent acts. Presently, over 47 thousand tons of highly radioactive waste is being stored at 118 nuclear reactors across the country. This is a reality which the federal agencies such as the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Department of Energy must grapple with before floating another pie-in-the-sky program which would fleece the electric power customer and pick the pocket of the American taxpayer.”

*- Lou Zeller, Nuclear Campaign Coordinator
Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL)*

Esse quam videre

“The Federal government's Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) proposal is to form GLOBAL Nuclear Energy Partnerships with select foreign countries. This means that we will be forming partnerships with countries that the U.S. deems trustworthy to handle weapons grade radioactive materials to be used for energy production. Not only will we provide foreign countries with the technology, but we will bring all of their radioactive waste back to the U.S. to be reprocessed along with the thousands of tons of U.S. commercial radioactive waste. Reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel will turn South Carolina into a de facto Yucca Mountain due to the fact that Yucca will likely never open as a national repository for nuclear waste and because there is no exit strategy for the vast amounts of radioactive waste that will be left behind from reprocessing. Nuclear waste shipments will be inundating South Carolina from all corners of the world. Not only our highways, but our oceans and harbors will be put at risk for accidents and terrorist attacks. Creating more nuclear waste, which is a part of the GNEP plan, is a bad enough idea. Shipping tens of thousands of containers of nuclear waste over land and sea is an even worse idea. To make matters worse the only way that all of these bad ideas will be implemented is by subsidizing them with billions of U.S. tax dollars. It time for our government to stop kowtowing to the nuclear industry and work to secure a safe energy future for the citizens of the U.S. “

- *Leslie Miner, Environmentalists, Inc.
Columbia, S.C.*

“Speaking on behalf of the Charlotte Area Green Party, I would like to express concern that in the current, long over-due, rush to jump on the “Stop the Global Warming” bandwagon the public might allow or even demand an increase in the production of nuclear power under the misguided impression that nuclear power is a “clean” source of energy. Plenty of carbon-based fuel is used in the mining and enrichment of uranium and in the transport of fresh and spent nuclear fuel. There is also the extremely “dirty” problem of nuclear waste. Citizens of the Charlotte area have always been too complacent about the dangers inherent in the operation of nuclear reactors located in their region. Furthermore, many of us are unaware of the additional dangers presented by the transport of nuclear fuel and waste through the Charlotte area to and from the Savannah River Site. We hope that the release of this map and its accompanying information will help alert the public to these dangers and rouse it from its complacency.”

- *Kathryn Koppers, Co-clerk
Charlotte Area Green Party*

“Although nuclear power has been touted as a very good alternative source of fuel, along with wind power, solar power and biofuels, for example, and indeed has some proponents within the Sierra Club, I am personally opposed to it for two basic reasons: (1) there is no long term solution to the problem of what to do with nuclear waste and radioactive contamination and (2) transportation of nuclear waste has to take place on roads that pass near all of us, an extremely risky business. Instead of nuclear power plants, we need to do a combination of things such as use the other alternative fuel sources available to us, mandate more fuel efficient cars, since we do have the technology, and reduce the carbon footprint, all the way from the individual to the biggest corporation.”

- *Joseph W. Zdenek, Ph.D., Chair
Henry's Knob Group
South Carolina Sierra Club*

Esse quam videre

“The Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP) is the Department of Energy’s proposed plan for reprocessing so-called “spent” nuclear fuel which is actually the most radioactive material that the nuclear age has handed down to us. This very high level waste from across the U.S., and perhaps globally, would be shipped to one centralized location. Of 11 such proposed locations Savannah River Site & Barnwell are the lead candidates - which is why we are so concerned about our part of the country increasingly becoming the Crossroads of the Nuclear Heartland.

Today’s report is mainly about the radiation hazards created by transportation of this high-level radioactive waste. First, these risks include severe accidents or intentional terrorist attacks that could release catastrophic amounts of radioactivity into the environment for miles downwind contaminating our communities, homes, schools, hospitals, work sites, and places of worship. Second, even “routine” shipments, which are like “x-ray machines that cannot be turned off, deliver “low level” doses of gamma radiation to workers or anyone near them. Shipments are allowed to emit gamma radiation to a distance of six feet - equivalent to one chest x-ray per hour.

Infants and children are especially sensitive to radiation. For more than 50 years we have known that a single x-ray dose to a fetus doubles that baby’s cancer risk. The closer a person is to a shipping cask the greater the exposure. The outer surface of a shipping container is permitted to give off radiation equivalent to 20 chest x-rays per hour. Additionally, should the outside surface of a cask become contaminated exposure to workers and the public would be much greater. We know of at least 50 such incidents that have occurred in the U.S. Imagine being stuck in a traffic jam, feeling trapped next to a radiation-emitting load.

Under conditions proposed in the **Global Nuclear Energy Partnership** hundreds or even thousands of new waste shipments would be moving within the U.S. every year. Transporting these hazardous radioactive wastes at highway speeds introduces considerably greater risks. There are unanswered questions about the ability of shipping containers to hold up in high speed crashes or prolonged fire. In 2006 the U.S. National Academies of Science advised that safety studies of such containers be intensified. A single truck cask may contain 40 times the radioactivity released by the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The accidental release of even a fraction of the contents of a high-level radioactive waste shipping container would be disastrous. Radioactive Waste Management Associates has reported that disastrous amounts of radioactivity would have been released from a single high-level radioactive waste container had it been aboard a train that caught fire in a tunnel beneath downtown Baltimore in 2001. Approximately 350,000 people would have been exposed to harmful radiation and up to 50 people would have inevitably died from cancer. If people continued living in such contaminated areas for a year up to 1,500 would have died from cancer. If people lived amidst contamination for 50 years up to 30,000 would have died from cancer.

Severe radioactive contamination could render a large area uninhabitable indefinitely. Under the proposed **Global Nuclear Energy Partnership** people intent on doing harm to our nation would be afforded new opportunities to do so. Commercial nuclear reactors and their wastes are currently stored onsite, not in downtown metropolitan areas. However, during transport these wastes would pass through major population centers, like Charlotte, by road and rail, and into major ports by barge. Terrorists could sabotage shipments, inflicting maximum damage and harming large numbers of people.

continued

Under the **Global Nuclear Energy Partnership** nuclear waste shipments would increase dramatically. During the first full year of operation the total number of shipments would be about the same number that have taken place during the entire 65 years of the nuclear age and this could then continue indefinitely. We are concerned about the health and safety of people who live in communities along routes of radioactive transportation. We would be much more concerned should planned shipments of these hazardous materials be greatly increased. These represent some of the reasons that the Western North Carolina Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility believes the **Global Nuclear Energy Partnership** proposal should not be approved. As long as nuclear power and nuclear weapons exist there will be problems protecting humans and all living beings from the long-term effects of radiation.”

- *Lewis E. Patrie, M.D., M.P.H., Chair
Western North Carolina Chapter
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Asheville, N.C.*

“It is unfortunate that our elected officials are doing nothing to stop the current administration from bringing the nuclear waste from power plants across the nation and possibly other nations to South Carolina. Besides allowing thousands of shipments of waste to be brought here, Congress is doing so after already passing legislation that gives the taxpayers the responsibility for the safety of it. The general practice for hazardous waste in our nation is that a creator of the hazardous waste is responsible for it "from cradle to grave." A creator of hazardous waste cannot simply pass ownership to someone else and forget about it. However, our elected officials in Washington, in their wisdom, have passed legislation (Price-Anderson Act, last extended in 2003) that gives you and I, the taxpayer, full responsibility for assuming the risks of handling the highly radioactive waste. Now they want to get the radioactive waste off the nuclear power sites and out of the responsibility of power companies and their investors. South Carolina appears to be the likely destination, and our elected officials are willing to allow this even though there is no permanent storage for the final radioactive waste after reprocessing. They argue that it is safe, but the investors and the market are not convinced. It has never been safe enough for insurance companies. That is why we have Price-Anderson Act. It is not safe enough for investors in new nuclear power. That is why they want to get it off their sites. Does anyone really think the final waste after reprocessing will be moved from South Carolina after it is here?”

- *Gerald Rudolph*
- *Carolina Peace Resource Center
Columbia, SC*