

The Nuclear Omnicide

by Harvey Wasserman

In the 35 years since the March 28, 1979 explosion and meltdown at Three Mile Island, fierce debate has raged over whether humans were killed there. In 1986 and 2011, Chernobyl and Fukushima joined the argument. Whenever these disasters happen, there are those who claim that the workers, residents and military personnel exposed to radiation will be just fine.

Of course we know better. We humans won't jump into a pot of boiling water. We're not happy when members of our species start dying around us. But frightening new scientific findings have forced us to look at a larger reality: the bottom-up damage that radioactive fallout may do to the entire global ecosystem.

When it comes to our broader support systems, the corporate energy industry counts on us to tolerate the irradiation of our fellow creatures, those on whom we depend, and for us to sleep through the point of no return.

Case in point is a new Smithsonian report on Chernobyl, one of the most terrifying documents of the atomic age. Written by Rachel Nuwer, "Forests Around Chernobyl Aren't Decaying Properly" cites recent field studies in which the normal cycle of

mutations, including a dog born with no eyes and cats with no sense of balance.

To this day, Three Mile Island's owners claim no humans were killed by radiation there, an assertion hotly disputed by local downwinders. Indeed, Dr. Alice Stewart established in 1956 that a single X-ray to a pregnant woman doubles the chance that her offspring will get leukemia. During the accident at Three Mile Island, the owners crowed that the meltdown's radiation was equivalent "only" to a single X-ray administered to all area residents.

Meanwhile, if the airborne fallout from Three Mile Island and Chernobyl could do that kind of damage to both infants and the nonhuman population on land, how is Fukushima's continuous gusher of radioactive water affecting the life support systems of our oceans?

Samplings of 15 tuna caught off the coast of California indicate all were contaminated with fallout from Fukushima. Instant as always, the industry deems such levels harmless. The obligatory comparisons to living in Denver, flying cross country and eating bananas automatically follow. But what's that radiation doing to the tuna themselves? And to the krill, the phytoplankton, the algae, amoebae and all the other microorganisms on which the ocean ecology depends?

Cesium and its Fukushima siblings are already measurable in Alaska and northwestern Canada.

They'll hit California this summer. The corporate media will mock those parents who are certain to show up at the beaches with radiation detectors. Concerns about the effect on children will be jovially dismissed. The doses will be deemed, as always, "too small to have any impact on humans." But reports of a "dead zone" thousands of miles into the Pacific do persist, along with disappearances of salmon, sardines, anchovies and other ocean fauna.

Of course, atomic reactors are not the only source of radioactive fallout. Atmospheric bomb testing from 1945 to 1963 raised background radiation levels throughout the ecosphere. Those isotopes are still with us. Burning coal spews still more radia-

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dead vegetation rotting into the soil has been disrupted by the exploded reactor's radioactive fallout. "Decomposers—organisms such as microbes, fungi and some types of insects that drive the process of decay—have also suffered from the contamination," Nuwer writes. "These creatures are responsible for an essential component of any ecosystem: recycling organic matter back into the soil."

Put simply: The microorganisms that form the active core of our ecological bio-cycle have apparently been zapped, leaving tree trunks, leaves, ferns and other vegetation to sit eerily on the ground whole, essentially in a mummified state. Reports also indicate a significant shrinkage of the brains of birds in the region and negative impacts on the insect and wildlife populations.

Similar findings surrounded the accident at Three Mile Island. Within a year, a three-reporter team from the *Baltimore News-American* catalogued massive radiation impacts on both wild and farm animals in the area. The reporters and the Pennsylvania Department of Health confirmed widespread damage to birds, bees and large kept animals such as horses, whose reproductive rate collapsed in the year after the accident.

Other reports also documented deformed vegetation and domestic animals being born with major

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tion into our air, along with mercury and other lethal pollutants. Fracking for gas draws toxins up from the earth's crust.

Industry apologists say reactors can moderate the climate chaos caused by burning those fossil fuels. But fighting global weirding with atomic power is like trying to cure a fever with a lethal dose of X-

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ray. On a warmed, poisoned planet, the synergistic impact of each new radioactive hit is multiplied. All doses are overdoses.

In 1982, Adm. Hyman Rickover, founder of the nuclear navy, put it this way:

Until about two billion years ago, it was impossible to have any life on earth; that is, there was so much radiation on earth you couldn't have any life—fish or anything.

Gradually, about two billion years ago, the amount of radiation on this planet ... reduced and made it possible for some form of life to begin, and it started in the seas...

Now, when we are back to using nuclear power, we are creating something which nature tried to destroy to make life possible...

But every time you produce radiation, you produce something that has life, in some cases for bil-

lions of years, and I think there the human race is going to wreck itself, and it's far more important that we get control of this horrible force and try to eliminate it.

We know from Dr. Alice Stewart the dangers of even a single X-ray to a pregnant human. And from Dr. John Gofman, former chief medical officer of the Atomic Energy Commission, that nuclear power is an instrument of "premeditated mass murder."

At Three Mile Island, the mutated vegetation, animal and human infant deaths still remain a part of the immutable record. Chernobyl still lacks a permanent sarcophagus, leaving the surrounding area vulnerable to continued radiation leakage. Fukushima daily dumps more than 300 tons of radioactive water into the Pacific. The stacks and spigots are still gushing at more than 400 reactors across the globe. The next disaster is already in progress.

The good news is that the same green energy technologies that can bury nuclear power can take the fossil burners down with them. They create jobs, profits, ecological harmony and peace. They're on a steep trajectory toward epic success.

As the reactor industry's lethal isotopes gut our ecosystems from bottom to top, our tolerance for these "safe doses" falls to zero. We may not fall over dead from them immediately, but the larger biospheric clock is ticking. We need to act.

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