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Date: Fri, Feb 14, 2003 3:28PM

Subject: Senator Carper asks NRC - why the cover-up? NRC avoids answering

I feel SO much better now that Sheehan of NRC tells that the leak will be fixed by 2016 or maybe 2036!!!!

Tritium is NOT as 'benign' as she says and they damn well know it.

I'm cc'ing this to Bob Fretz of NRC, who I urge to provide us with an explanation as to why this leak was covered up, and an assurance that it will be fixed NOW, not in 15 years.

Norm

February 14, 2003

Senator questions late reporting of leak at Salem N-plant

By JACK KASKEY Staff Writer, (609) 272-7213, E-Mail <mailto:jkaskey@pressofac.com>

LOWER ALLOWAYS CREEK TOWNSHIP - Federal and state regulators continued to investigate the cause of a radiation leak at the Salem nuclear generating station Thursday, even as a senator in Washington, D.C., grilled the Nuclear Regulatory Commission as to why the leak was not reported to the public for more than a month.

The leak first was suspected after tritium was detected on the protective boot of a plant employee in December, but plant operator PSEG Nuclear issued no public notification until tritium was discovered Thursday in two, 20-foot-deep monitoring wells adjacent to Salem Unit 1.

The state Department of Environmental Protection announced Monday it had confirmed the tritium in groundwater, saying the detected levels were 2.5 to 3.5 higher than state groundwater quality standards allow.

Tritium is formed when cooling water passes through the reactor core or circulates through the spent fuel pools. It can cause cancer if ingested. There are no public supply wells in the vicinity, however, and officials have said neither the public nor plant workers are immediately threatened.

During a Senate subcommittee hearing Thursday morning, Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., asked NRC Chairman Richard Meserve and four NRC commissioners about the delay in the public notification of the contamination.

"The best way to confront those who are skeptical about nuclear power is with facts," Carper said. "(The NRC) needs to be more forthcoming with the people of New Jersey and Delaware. We expect our nuclear facilities to operate under the absolute highest levels of safety and concern for the public."

Jenn Connell, the senator's spokeswoman, said the NRC officials did not directly answer the question.

Results from other newly drilled monitoring wells at the plant still are pending, state and federal officials said.

NRC regional spokesman Neil Sheehan said efforts to locate the source of the leak include examining the spent fuel pool, where highly radioactive fuel rods are stored in a bath of water.

Once the leak is found and repaired, the contamination will be monitored to make sure it doesn't migrate, Sheehan said. By the time the plant is decommissioned in 2016 or 2036 - if it receives its relicensing for 20 years - the leak likely will be cleaned up, he said.

The half-life of tritium is about 12 years, meaning it loses half of its radioactivity every 12 years.

"Tritium is a fairly benign radionuclide," Sheehan said. "It's water-soluble form would be excreted from the body quickly."

Salem Units 1 and 2 and the Hope Creek plant, all on Artificial Island bordering Delaware Bay, form the second-largest commercial nuclear facility in the nation. The plants are not required to shut down because of the spill, Sheehan said.

A plant spokesman has said the size of the tritium spill is far below the amount found in a standard exit sign or in an illuminated wristwatch dial.

A tritium leak at Brookhaven National Laboratory on Long Island, N.Y., required the spent-fuel pool to be emptied for repairs.

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Coalition for Peace and Justice and the UNPLUG Salem Campaign; 321 Barr Ave., Linwood, NJ 08221; 609-601-8583 or 609-601-8537; ncohen12@comcast.net UNPLUG SALEM WEBSITE: <http://www.unplugsalem.org/> COALITION FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE WEBSITE: <http://www.coalitionforpeaceandjustice.org> The Coalition for Peace and Justice is a chapter of Peace Action.

"First they ignore you; Then they laugh at you; Then they fight you; Then you win. (Gandhi)

"Why walk when you can fly?" (Mary Chapin Carpenter)

CC: Jill Lipoti <jlipoti@dep.state.nj.us>, nukenet <nukenet@envirolink.org>, NRC CONCERNS <nrc_concerns@yahoogroups.com>, Robert Fretz <RXF@nrc.gov>

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