

Posted Online: January 29, 2006

Exelon execs face heat from homeowners about tritium

Homeowners want to know why

By Robyn Monaghan

rmonaghan@daily-journal.com
815-937-1281

For the second time in as many days, Exelon executive Tom O'Neill admitted he was wrong.

Exelon was remiss to wait seven years to go public with pipeline leaks that flooded the area east of Godley with water containing high concentrations of the radioactive nuclear power byproduct tritium, O'Neill said at a press conference Wednesday.

Thursday, facing a roomful of scared and angry citizens, he apologized again.

"I said I know how you feel and that was wrong," said O'Neill, vice president of Regulatory Affairs for Exelon.

"I can't know how you and your families feel," he said. "Only you can know how it feels to be in your shoes."

Those who came to the plant that night were there to let him know.

Most of all, they feel betrayed by the seven years that lapsed between the first spill and the round of water sampling and information circulating that Exelon launched last month.

"You're all jumping through hoops now, but tell me what was in my water any of these 3,000 days that passed since that first spill," said Bob Keca, who lives on Smiley Road, closest to where the flooding happened.

"You covered this up and that's criminal," he said.

The folks who live in the wake of the tritium spills worry about their pets, which sip water from puddles. They worry about eating the deer, which they've seen leaping company fences, that they shoot in the forest and fields. They wonder about the safety of the milk that comes from cows grazing in the meadows, about the fish they hook in ponds, about the corn growing in the fields.

Environmental experts hired by Exelon tell everyone over and over that there's nothing to be afraid of. Tritium moves quickly through a mammal's body. The concentrations of tritium they might consume -- at worst -- pose no threat above eating a banana each day.

E-123

Unlike the tritium, which company officials say they never dreamed would slip into the soil and spread, the message doesn't seem to sink in.

The men and women at the **Braidwood** Generating Station Thursday were mad. They were mad that the company never told them what was going on in their world, never warned them about a danger that might be seeping through their lawns.

They neighbors are worried about their wallets along with their health. A typical split-level home sells for upwards of \$350,000 on Center Street, Smiley Road and Comet Drive, just east of the plant where the spills occurred.

Vince DeSalvo bought his house on Fair Oaks Drive just last year. He wouldn't have done it if he'd known about the tritium leaks.

"It's a matter of perception," DeSalvo said. "It doesn't matter if tritium is bad for you or not. Once somebody hears about the spills, they're going to run the other way."

"Would you guys buy a house here?" Wanda Alderman asked the panel of Exelon executives flown in from across the country to deal with the **Braidwood** situation.

The VPs were tongue-tied.