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From: Ace Hoffman [rhoffman@animatedsoftware.com]
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Subject: From CounterPunch: "Double Your Trouble With Nuclear Power"

December 6th, 2012

Dear Readers,

This superb synopsis of the current state of the nuclear industry was originally published in CounterPunch yesterday, and is presented here at the request of the authors.

Ace Hoffman
Carlsbad, CA

December 05, 2012

Bad for Health, Bad for Business

Double Your Trouble With Nuclear Power

CounterPunch

by JOSEPH MANGANO and Dr. JANETTE SHERMAN, MD

Industry leaders will have no problem closing nuclear reactors that don't generate expected profits. Exelon, the Chicago-based company that owns 17 of the 104 U.S. reactors, recently saw its stock price drop below $30 a share, the same level as mid-2003, and a whopping 70% below its peak of over $92 a share in mid-2008.

The standard explanation for this reversal is cost. In particular, electricity from growing natural gas and wind sources costs less to produce than that from nuclear reactors. The famous 1954 promise by Atomic Energy Commission head Lewis Strauss that the atom would create energy "too cheap to meter" has failed miserably. But while cost is the reason why utilities will be closing reactors, most reports fail to look beneath the surface and understand WHY nukes are so expensive.

The answer is that nuclear power poses great danger to safety and health. This danger means that reactors must comply with numerous safety regulations; must be built with many safety features; and must be manned by a large and highly trained work force - each a high-ticket item. In addition, the fleet of 104 U.S. reactors in operation is aging - most over 30 years old - requiring that corroding parts be replaced, pushing costs even higher.

Another element in the high cost of nukes won't be faced until they are decommissioned (after closing). Decommissioning costs run hundreds of millions of dollars per reactor. Utilities are forced by federal law to keep a large decommissioning fund while operating reactors, to prevent them from simply closing reactors, not securing them, and sticking taxpayers with the bill.

Even with all these extensive and expensive efforts to protect the public, nukes still aren't safe. The chance of a meltdown exists every day, from human error, natural disaster, or terrorist act. The disasters at Chernobyl in 1986 and at Fukushima last year remind us that catastrophic meltdowns that affect thousands to millions are a sobering reality. In addition

to meltdowns, there is the matter of routine emissions from reactors and elevated cancer rates near reactors, demonstrated in many studies. Finally, the U. S. and other nations still have no long-term plans to store the massive amounts of hazardous nuclear waste.

Dominion Nuclear recently announced that the Kewaunee reactor in Wisconsin will permanently shut down in the spring. This action is a milestone. Not only will this be the first U.S. reactor closed since 1998, but it will likely be followed by numerous other shutdowns. An October 23 New York Times article was headlined "Reactors Face Mothballs."

Kewaunee's closing also represents a turning point. For over a decade, nuclear leaders steadily proclaimed an era of a revival, after years of no growth. But the word "renaissance" has vanished, and nuclear power is now in full retreat.

So which reactors will join Kewaunee and be the next to close? Nobody knows for sure, but there are a number of reactors that are faring poorly, and are candidates for shutdown:

- Crystal River (Florida), closed for over three years, needs considerable funds to replace defective parts

- San Onofre (California, two reactors), closed for nearly one year due to faulty steam generators, will require millions to repair.

- Oyster Creek (New Jersey), which must shut down by 2019, may close sooner according to Exelon executives who cite costs and market forces

- Vermont Yankee (Vermont), up for sale (and like Kewaunee with no buyers), along with stiff opposition from local citizens and elected officials

- Clinton (Illinois), another Exelon reactor, has been hit hard by cheaper alternatives

- Indian Point (New York, two reactors), faced considerable citizen and political opposition ever since a plane hijacked by terrorists on 9/11 flew directly over it on its way to the World Trade Center.

This autumn has been the worst period for U.S. nuclear reactors in a long time. Hurricane Sandy caused six reactors to close temporarily, while others were shut to change fuel, and others closed due to mechanical problems. From mid-October to late November, U.S. reactors operated at just 70-75% of capacity, down sharply from the 90% figure of the past decade.

Shrinking nuclear power is even more pronounced overseas. In Japan, nearly two years after Fukushima, only 2 of 54 reactors are operating, and the majority of Japanese are fiercely opposed to restarting any reactors. Soon after Fukushima, governments in Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland announced plans to phase out nuclear power, and Germany has already closed half a dozen reactors.

The business troubles facing reactors are nothing new - historical construction costs far exceeded original estimates, and Wall Street executives stopped lending money for new reactors in the 1970s. Fewer reactors will mean reduced threats to health but also reduced costs - proving what's good for the environment is also good for business.

Joseph Mangano, MPH MBA, is an epidemiologist, and Executive Director of the Radiation and Public Health Project (www.radiation.org).

Janette Sherman, MD is an internist and toxicologist. (www.janettesherman.com).

Ace Hoffman, computer programmer,
author, The Code Killers:
An Expose of the Nuclear Industry
Free download: acehoffman.org
Blog: acehoffman.blogspot.com
YouTube: youtube.com/user/AceHoffman
Phone: (760) 720-7261
Address: PO Box 1936, Carlsbad, CA 92018 Subscribe to my free newsletter today!
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