

## **NRCExecSec Resource**

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### The Perfect Serial Killer

#### Background Information

Back in 1939, one of the early nuclear energy pioneers, Leo Szilard, described a new discovery to Albert Einstein, he labeled it uranium fission. As discussed in Craig Nelson's 2014 book, *The Age of Radiance*, Einstein, when hearing of fission, was quiet for a moment, then explained, "I hadn't thought of that at all." Einstein went on to say that fission would be the first source of energy for human beings that did not derive from the sun. This is still, to this day, over 75 years later, technically true. The sun's light powers photosynthesis-the original force of coal, oil, and natural gas-and its heat and light together generate solar, while uranium is derived, like all elements, from supernovas, meaning "a" sun but not "the" sun. Therefore it is an alien sun that has made fission possible, as well as all its resulting effects, both good and bad.

#### The Killer

The trouble with this alien atomic energy is that it has given birth to radiation which is, in my opinion, the "perfect serial killer". Why, you say? Because it is so hard to pin down radiation even as a "person of interest" let alone even a suspect or a killer in a crime. Look how hard it has been to pin down tobacco or asbestos or meds as culprits let alone to try and pin down radiation as even an accessory to the murder or maiming of people and animals and their offspring. Even Dr G, the medical examiner in her famous TV show, would not be able to determine radiation as a precise cause of death. Pinning any untoward outcome on radiation is as "difficult as nailing Jell-O to a tree".

You just never know with radiation or nuclear reactors. None of our human senses (sight, sound, smell, etc.) help us detect radiation. Radiation is just the atomic version of poisonous carbon monoxide (CO). Radiation can and has been a silent deadly killer. At least if you survive CO poisoning there are no untoward after-effects. The gas is purged from your system. However, radiation and radioactivity stay around like relatives that hang around too long, only much worse. Radiation poisoning has so-called "acute" and "latent" effects i.e. immediate and long-lasting effects. Furthermore the amount of radiation anyone receives can only be estimated. And you must trust others to get that estimate. Even well after radioactive releases have occurred the so-called experts have widely varying estimates as to how much exposure individuals really received. Don't get me

wrong, radiation has many important benefits especially in medicine. However, when it comes to A-bombs and A-plants it is much different. You know very well, when you see the doc for radiation therapy, exactly what the benefits and risks are. And you make the decision whether you will take those risks or not. With A-plants the only choice you have, if you can afford it, is not to live anywhere near one. And that is increasing difficult to do. Using 2010 population data, one in three Americans (or 116,000,000 people) now live within 50 miles of a nuclear power plant. In my opinion, we must do everything we can to make nuclear power plants and their horrible radioactive wastes a nightmare of the past.

Richard Andrews