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Limited Appearance Statement of United Citizens Against Nukes (UCAN)  
A Connecticut Group

Given by Louise Besson - New Canaan

Our group has its members in lower Fairfield County, Connecticut. Those of us who drafted this statement live in New Canaan and Wilton. When one of us clocked the distance from Indian Point to her house it was about 34 miles by the winding road. As the crow flies and the wind blows, the distance is considerably less.

So, in case of any significant emission of radiation from the Indian Point Plant, and depending on the wind direction at the time, we could be directly in the path of a radiation plume. Dr. Arnold Sternglass has written about the radiation effects after the Three Mile Island (TMI) accident. He took statistics on infant mortality from Harrisburg on East. He was looking to see where infant mortality rates had risen sharply during the months after the TMI accident. He was able to plot a wide plume of radiation from TMI up the coast of New England from the statistic figures of rising mortality. The sharp rise peaked in July, four months after the accident. Dr. Sternglass believes that the radiation affected the develop- infants' thyroids, and this caused their death in utero or immediately after, for no apparent other cause. If infants were born dead as a result of the radiation, then we contend that our reservoirs and our vegetable gardens and our cows were also exposed. We do not consider these deaths of babies a tolerable side effect of a defective nuclear reactor. Nor do we relish the thought of the cancers which will probably develop as a side effect of the TMI accident. We consider that the Indian Point facility has proved itself to be defective in many ways in recent years and we have repeatedly made our feelings known to the NRC. We earnestly desire that this old and faulty facility be closed down before a disaster occurs.

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Playing the scenario for a real disaster at the Indian Point Plant has probably been avoided as something too garish to contemplate. The electric companies don't want to admit that accidents can happen. They persist in advertising that nuclear power never killed a single human being in its long history, and that accidents simply cannot occur. But accidents have occurred, human beings have been killed, directly at Idaho Falls in 1961, when four workers met their death, and indirectly all the way from American Indians near uranium mines to the infants born dead after TMI.

Let us look at a scenario of what to do in case of an accident at Indian Point. In the first place, would the Indian Point workers tell the NRC right away that they were in trouble? And would they ask for help? Next, who would notify the town authorities of Buchanan and Peekskill, or the police, or the radio stations? And having done these things, how would one control the resultant panic? The floods of phone calls? The jammed roads? We are assuming that some people will decide to get out of the area as fast as possible with a reckless disregard for the hazards of radiation plumes and other people on the road.

The Nuclear Industry and the Anti-Nukers have been talking at cross purposes. When the word "radiation" is used, the Industry means only gamma rays; the Anti-Nukers mean not only gamma rays but also the alpha and beta particles - minute, irradiated, dustlike. When the Union of Concerned Scientists tell us that from normal operation of a plant, alpha and beta particles are escaping and getting into us via the water, plants and cows' milk, we believe them. It is a mystery to us why the nuclear industry poohpoohs this concept.

We think Con Ed should try to prove that alpha and beta particles are not showing up in the environment and that the incidence of cancer is not rising gradually in the towns around Indian Point in a 35-mile radius. Depending on the direction of the wind and the time of day, many towns full of people may be affected by the alphas and betas. With a West wind Ridgefield and Danbury are reached. With North and Northwest, Ossining, Mt. Kisco, Tarrytown and White Plains. And with any southerly wind Peekskill is right there. With the money available for cancer research it would be important to us all for someone to compile statistics on the cancers diagnosed in this area. Most of the towns affected by down-winds from Indian Point have hospitals. Perhaps they would assist in the study.

When we had our summer demonstration at Indian Point in 1979, many of us released balloons to see where they would go. They headed straight off over the reservoir areas. These reservoirs feed New York City.

Speaking of down-winds, here is a dramatic illustration. When raking leaves in our New Canaan back yard a few years ago, my husband found a balloon with a ticket attached to it saying it came from North Bergen, New Jersey, sent two days ago as a project with a science teacher, and asking finder to report to sender where it had been found. For this reason we feel that a much larger segment of the surrounding country can be affected by accidents from nuclear plants. If for a balloon we substitute alphas and betas, we feel that Indian Point is as much of a threat to us as it is to the people of Buchanan. We do not even trust the operators of Indian Point to tell us when there has been some sort of event. What we see here and all over the country, is an attempt to hush up the event. Very reluctant admissions are drawn out over days at a time, far too late for anyone to take any sort of precaution.

We understand that a nuclear reactor must be vented periodically during normal operation. Can Con Ed prove that absolutely no alpha or beta particles are released in these routine ventings? We feel that the Nuclear Industry had no business to begin operating before more tests were run on the various escapes that might occur. We very much resent having been human subjects for the nuclear experiment.

We think you will agree that some natural disasters are beyond the reach of human preparation, like the eruption of Mount St. Helens, or tidal waves, or earthquakes. We consider that an old and tired nuclear reactor even 35 miles away could become a disaster like these in its own way. And there would be no calling it back. The released plutonium would be for ever. Nobody could assess the extent of the disaster at first. Nobody really knows how bad it might actually be. It will take decades to discover what really happened to the environment after TMI, and it could be the same or worse here at Indian Point. Would you gentlemen of the NRC and of Con Ed want to have a worst scenario disaster on your consciences?

A power plant was originally intended for a benefit to society, but if it becomes a threat to health and safety it is no longer any benefit. We deplore this Titanic-is-unsinkable attitude of allowing Indian Point to continue operating when it develops cracks, and leaks, and shows signs of corrosion. How economical can it be now, if one or other of the three reactors is shut down for frequent periods of time?

We wish we could persuade Con Ed to find other ways of supplying power to New York City as quickly as possible. And for the safety of all of us, that an impartial observer be there from now on until the whole process of shutdown and decommissioning has been completed.

This statement reflects our feelings harbored for many years. Ever since the Union of Concerned Scientists first made known that Indian Point was an accident waiting to happen, we have felt indignation that so many people living around this area have been ignored by a small group of operators who are completely callous to the possible dangers to all this population. They seem very busy denying that anything is amiss. We also feel despair that we see cancer afflicting our 60-year-old friends, and despair that it is found in children and young people as well. We feel despair that the operators of the reactors brand our protests as hysteria. We feel despair that no one in authority appears to have a sense of responsibility for us the consumers and the victims.

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