

AMERICAN SCENARIO

Nuclear Nightmare

Ralph Nader

The unfolding multiple nuclear catastrophe in Japan is prompting overdue attention to the 104 nuclear plants in the United States—many of them aging, many of them near earthquake faults, some on the west coast exposed to potential tsunamis.

Nuclear power plants boil water to produce steam to turn turbines that generate electricity. Nuclear power's overly complex fuel cycle begins with uranium mines and ends with deadly radioactive wastes for which there still are no permanent storage facilities to contain them for tens of thousands of years.

Atomic power plants generate 20 percent of America's electricity. Over forty years ago, the industry's promoter and regulator, the Atomic Energy Commission estimated that a full nuclear meltdown could contaminate an area "the size of Pennsylvania" and cause massive casualties. But the taxpayers, have heavily subsidized nuclear power research, development, and promotion from day one with tens of billions of dollars.

Because of many costs, perils, close calls at various reactors, and the partial meltdown at the Three Mile Island plant in Pennsylvania in 1979, there has not been a nuclear power plant built in the United States since 1974 then.

Now the industry is coming back "on your back" claiming it will help reduce global warming from fossil fuel emitted greenhouse gases.

Pushed aggressively by President Obama and Energy Secretary Chu, who refuses to meet with longtime nuclear industry critics, here is what "on your back" means:

- Wall Street will not finance new nuclear plants without a 100% taxpayer loan guarantee. Too risky. That's a lot of guarantee given that new nukes cost \$12 billion each, assuming no mishaps. Obama and the Congress are OK with that arrangement.
- Nuclear power is uninsurable in the private insurance market—too risky. Under the Price-Anderson Act, taxpayers pay the greatest cost of a meltdown's devastation.
- Nuclear power plants and transports of radioactive wastes are a national security nightmare for the Department of Homeland Security. Imagine the target that thousands of vulnerable spent fuel rods present for sabotage.
- Who pays for whatever final waste repositories are licensed? The taxpayer and his descendants. Huge decommissioning costs, at the end of a nuclear plant's existence come from the ratepayers' pockets.
- Nuclear plant disasters present impossible evacuation burdens for those living anywhere near a plant, especially if time is short.
- Imagine evacuating the long-troubled Indian Point plants 26 miles north of New York City. Workers in that region have a hard enough time evacuating their places of employment during 5 pm rush hour. That's one reason Secretary of State Clinton (in her time as Senator of New York) and Governor Andrew Cuomo called for the shutdown of Indian Point.

Nuclear power is both uneconomical and unnecessary. It can't compete against energy conservation, including cogeneration, windpower and ever more efficient, quicker, safer, renewable forms of providing electricity. Amory Lovins argues this point convincingly. Physicist Lovins asserts that nuclear power "will reduce and retard climate protection." His

reasoning: shifting the tens of billions invested in nuclear power to efficiency and renewables reduce far more carbon per dollar.

America should move deliberately to shutdown nuclear plants, starting with the aging and seismically threatened reactors. Peter Bradford, a former Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) commissioner has also made a compelling case against nuclear power on economic and safety grounds.

The people in northern Japan may lose their land, homes, relatives, and friends as a result of *a dangerous technology designed simply to boil water*. There are better ways to generate steam.

Like the troubled Japanese nuclear plants, the Indian Point plants and the four plants at San Onofre and Diablo Canyon in southern California rest near earthquake faults. The seismologists concur that there is a 94% chance of a big earthquake in California within the next thirty years. Obama, Chu and the powerful nuke industry must not be allowed to force the American people to play Russian Roulette! □□□

[source : nader.org]