News from Beyond Nuclear

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Nuclear Intervenors Declare Independence from Fermi 3:

"No Indoctrination without Representation!"

regarding Fermi 1 history

Monroe, MI –This Independence Day, the coalition of Fermi 3 nuclear intervenors have filed a legal contention challenging the denial of public participation in the official historical 'recordation' of the Fermi 1 Fast Breeder Reactor, which experienced a core-melt accident on October 5, 1966. [link to intervenors' contention][http://www.beyondnuclear.org/storage/Hist%20contn%20COMPLET.pdf] In order to build the proposed Fermi 3 nuclear reactor, the Fermi 1 containment shell must be demolished, in order to make room for the new construction. As Fermi 1 has been named to the National Register of Historic Places, DTE/Detroit Edison must mitigate its destruction by establishing an official historical 'recordation,' with an archive for their previous failed experiment. But the intervenors allege the public has been denied participation in that legally required process, a violation of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

Fermi 3 intervenor Shirley Steinman of Monroe declared "No indoctrination without representation!" and added that "DTE has cherry-picked what will go into the Fermi 1 archive, omitting the true nature and intent of this failed early atomic debacle."

"As concerned citizens and official intervenors in these proceedings, we demand representation as the history of Fermi 1 is shaped for passage on to future generations," Shirley Steinman added.

Terry Lodge, attorney for intervenors, said: "Public participation is essential in the mitigation decision for Fermi 1, in order to ensure truth-telling of the Fermi 1 story, along with a realistic explanation of the context in which the grand experiment was launched, and failed."

"The 'official' narrative of this 20th century failure must not be hijacked for use as pro-industry promotion by the 21st century nuclear industry," Lodge added.

Drawing on congressional and Atomic Energy Commission records, intervenors submitted three little known historical documents to the Fermi 3 U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) which reveal the true nature of the Fermi 1 failed experiment. By their actions behind closed doors, intervenors charge, DTE/Detroit Edison and the NRC have systematically denied public participation in the development of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on historic preservation mitigation, violating the NHPA. The intervenors insist there are significant additional historical documents which must be placed into the 'recordation' archive. As examples, intervenors have provided to ASLB primary historical records that include: Atomic Energy Commission/Nuclear Power Development Corporation history and objectives; congressional testimony of Professor David R. Inglis; and documentation on how close the Fermi 1 meltdown came to a "terrifying," catastrophic radioactivity release. Excerpts are provided below.

According to now declassified Atomic Energy Commission documents written by the Nuclear Power Development Project (Dow Chemical – Detroit Edison and Associates), dated December 1, 1953:

"…The military aspects of this reactor and its great value in the country's defense potential have not been given appropriate emphasis. In fact, the industrial study groups were advised at one time that they should not anticipate a military market for plutonium.

Apparently this situation has changed and ***the military aspects as we see them are:***

1. ***High rate of production of fissionable material...***We are of the opinion that this source, once proven economic, could be provided, ***at little or no cost to the government,*** by breeder reactors installed by private industry for the primary purpose of generating electric power...

3. ***Unique Weapons Materials.*** The physical characteristics of the fast reactor and the rapid processing with the contemplated metallurgical separations system will permit our reactor to provide ***very high purity weapons material.*** In

addition, the rapid processing will make available ***a source of fresh fission products for radiological weapons." (emphases added)***

[link to 1953 AEC/Nuclear Power Development Project document]

[http://www.beyondnuclear.org/storage/Nuclear%20Power%20Development%20Project%20-%20Fermi%20I%20Dec%201%201953.pdf]

At a hearing convened in 1974 by the congressional Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, Professor David Inglis, of the University of Massachusetts, a former senior nuclear physicist at the Argonne Laboratory who had worked at Los Alamos on weapons development during World War II, testified:

"Let me explain how ***my confidence has since been so shaken that I now urge that no further commercial power reactors should be built at the present stage of development and need.*** One has always tried to imagine every possible combination of circumstances that might lead to a serious accident and to prevent it. A maximum credible accident was formulated, an accident so nearly impossible that one need not protect against it. While there had been lesser malfunctions and indications of insufficient caution, ***confidence was greatly shaken in 1966 by the Fermi Breeder Reactor accident, more serious than had been declared the maximum credible. For me the piercing impression of this event was second only to seeing the first atomic fireball at Alamagordo.*** Some people find confidence in the fact that the partial melt-down was contained and the back-up scram system worked just in time to prevent the unpredictable consequences of fast criticality. ***Others are concerned that the partial melt-down could occur at all in a reactor operating luckily at only one-tenth of full power...In view of the radioactive catastrophe that could ensue from failure of pressure systems, it is disquieting also that a plant could be put into operation after its welds had been competently questioned and that in it a failure of a pressure system did occur, fortunately not involving radioactivity and only killing two workers." (emphases added)***

[link to 1974 Inglis congressional testimony]

[http://www.beyondnuclear.org/storage/Congressional%20Testimony%20of%20Professor%20David%20R.%20Inglis%20-%20Fermi%20I%20January%201974.pdf]

Similarly, *The Careless Atom* by Sheldon Novick, (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA, 1968, pp. 158-163) is another alternative retelling of the Fermi 1 meltdown story, contrary to the nuclear establishment's "official" rendition:

"…A meeting was held...Large amounts of radioactive fission products in

these samples made it clear that ***a portion of the reactor fuel had melted.*** Once this had been established, ***there was great concern, for the possibility of further, and more serious, accidents existed.*** Walter J. McCarthy, Jr., Assistant General Manager of the Power Reactor Development Corporation, who was present at this meeting, later stated that ***the possibility of such a secondary accident was a 'terrifying thought'…***

The possibility that Walter McCarthy called a 'terrifying thought' and that preoccupied the meeting after the accident was that a large quantity of fuel had melted and then recongealed when the reactor was shut down. Those at the meeting feared that enough uranium had recongealed so that ***a disturbance of the core -- by an attempt to remove the damaged fuel, for example -- would jar it into a critical mass*** too great to be controlled by the control rods, which were already at their maximum.

The result could have been an explosion -- nowhere near as great as that of nuclear weapon, but ***perhaps great enough to rupture the steel and concrete containment structure of the reactor. A large portion of the radioactive gases held within the core would then have been released to the atmosphere, and would have drifted uncontrolled with the wind. The huge quantities of radioactivy involved, and the proximity of Detroit, made such prospect terrifying indeed." (emphases added)***

[link to excerpt from The Careless Atom]

[http://www.beyondnuclear.org/storage/The%20Careless%20Atom%20-%20Sheldon%20Novick%20-%201968.pdf]

"The story of Fermi 1's nearly catastrophic failure offers a large window into the history of commercial nuclear power, an institutional void of safety culture within the primary regulatory agency, and nuclear power's inherent weapons connection," said Keith Gunter of Livonia, a launch partner of Beyond Nuclear. "After all, as John G. Fuller's book and Gil Scott-Heron's song titles put it, 'We Almost Lost Detroit,' not to mention Monroe, Toledo, and beyond," Keith Gunter added.

Although the executed Memorandum of Agreement apparently was transmitted to the federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation on March 7, 2012, there has been no *Federal Register* announcement or other notice to the public.

[link to May 12, 2012 document]

[http://www.beyondnuclear.org/storage/Fermi%201%20Historical%20May%207%202012%20docketed%205-31-12.pdf]

The intervenors, which include Beyond Nuclear, Citizens for Alternatives to

Chemical Contamination, Citizens Environment Alliance of Southwestern Ontario, Don't Waste Michigan, the Sierra Club Michigan Chapter, and numerous concerned citizens, demand a seat at the decision making table, their legal right under the National Historic Preservation Act.

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Beyond Nuclear aims to educate and activate the public about the connections between nuclear power and nuclear weapons and the need to abandon both to safeguard our future. Beyond Nuclear advocates for an energy future that is sustainable, benign and democratic.