

Three Mile Island Had Lasting Consequences

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Dear Editor:

I was deeply disappointed in David Whitford's causal dismissal of the impact the Three Mile Island ("TMI") accident had on our community, i.e. *Rethinking Three Mile Island*. Without supplying any hard data, Mr. Whitford regurgitates the mantra of the nuclear renaissance:

"But guess what? No one died at Three Mile Island. No one even got hurt. Hard evidence simply does not exist that any living thing, animal or vegetable, was significantly harmed by the small amount of radiation released during the accident. Even in the most extreme cases, the exposure was less than anyone living in the area receives from natural sources."

Perhaps Mr. Whitford was referring to the University of Pittsburgh (1) health study which was essentially a recitation of discredited protocol and disputed data. Rereleased on October 31, 2002, the study actually acknowledged an increase in lymphatic and blood cancers among men.

Also, as in previous health studies relating to TMI, this survey relied on government and nuclear industry sponsored "health studies" which were completed in the early 1980s. These studies were based on inaccurate dose projections, did not factor data regarding the severity and conditions of the core meltdown (2), and ignored prevailing weather conditions and wind patterns in March-April, 1979.

None of these "studies" evaluate the health impact to members of our community who defueled Three Mile Island. In fact, TMI's owners choose not to maintain a health or cancer registry despite the fact, that from 1979-1989, 5,000 cleanup workers received 'measurable doses' of radiation exposure. (3)

Moreover, the University of Pittsburgh's Study relied heavily on the much maligned Pennsylvania Department of Health's 22-year-old survey released in September, 1985. That Study's protocol was ridiculed and criticized by epidemiologists at Harvard and Penn State for "diluting" increases in cancer by "expanding" the population base to include people living outside of the ten-mile study-zone. (October; 1985.) (4)

A great deal of radiation was released by the core melt at TMI. The President's Commission estimated about 15 million curies of radiation were released into the atmosphere. A review of dose assessments, conducted by Dr. Jan Beyea, (National Audubon Society; 1984) (5) estimated that from 276 to 63,000 person-rem were delivered to the general population within 50 miles of TMI. More recently, David Lochbaum of the Union of Concerned Scientists, estimated between 40 million curies and 100 million curies escaped during the accident.

The plant's owners, codefendants and insurers have paid over \$84 million in health, economic and evacuation claims, including a \$1.1 million settlement for a baby born with Down's Syndrome. (6) In June 2000, the United States Supreme Court remanded 1,990 unsettled health suits from the TMI-accident back to Federal Court. (GPU v. Abrams; Dolan v. GPU.) (7)

In August 1996, a study by the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill authored by Dr. Steven Wing reported that "...there were reports of erythema, hair loss, vomiting, and pet death near TMI at the time of the accident...Accident doses were positively associated with cancer incidence. Associations were largest for leukemia, intermediate for lung cancer, and smallest for all cancers combined...Inhaled radionuclide contamination could differentially impact lung cancers, which show a clear dose-related increase." (8)

Today, TMI-2 remains a high-level radioactive waste in the middle of the Susquehanna River. There was no decommissioning fund established for TMI at the time of the accident. (9) The site of the nation's worst commercial nuclear accident has not been decontaminated nor decommissioned. There has not been a human entry in the basement of the reactor building since March, 1979.

TMI is an accident without an ending. Next time you drive through our community, stop for a while, and read the fine print on the nuclear label.

Sincerely,

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End Notes

1 Environment Health Perspectives, June , 2000.

2 On November 6, 1984, research conducted by the Department of Energy on reactor damage during the accident, indicates temperatures may have reached in excess of 4,800 degrees. In October 1985, removal of damaged fuel from TMI-2 began.

3 On April 11, 1984, William Pennsylv settled out-of-court two days before an administrative law judge was scheduled to hear his case relating to GPU's refusal to allow Pennsylv to wear a respirator during cleanup activities.

By 1986, TMI-2 defueling work force peaks at 2,000, but by 1989, after ten years of defueling activities, 5,000 TMI workers have received "measurable doses" of radiation exposure.

4 *State's TMI study clouded by survey method doubts*, Frank Lynch, "Sunday Patriot-News", Front Page, Harrisburg, PA, October 6, 1985.

5 Study available from the TMI Public Health Fund, 16223 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103, #215-875-3926.

6 By 1985, TMI had paid at least \$14 million for out-of-court settlements of personal injury lawsuits. The largest settlement was for a child born with Down's Syndrome. Most of the cases were "sealed", and only those cases involving "minors" are published as prescribed by the rules and regulations of Pennsylvania's Orphan's Court.

7 On June 12, 2000, the United States Supreme Court, without comment, rejected an appeal by GPU to throw out 1,990 health suits. On May 2, 2001, the Third Circuit Court ruled that "new theories" to support medical claims against Three Mile Island will not be allowed.

8 *New Study Shows Higher Cancer Rate near Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Reactor Meltdown.*

Researchers at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have published, in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* (February 24, 1997), a reevaluation of the health effects near Three Mile Island. They have found chromosomal damage and higher cancer rates than previously reported, suggesting radiation levels were higher than official estimates.

Copies of the study may be requested at: #919-541-3345.

9 December, 1993, GPU placed TMI-2 in Post-Defueling Monitored Storage.

In their *1997 Annual Report*, GPU reported that the cost to decommission TMI-2 doubled in four years. The original \$200 million projection has been increased to \$399 million for radioactive decommissioning. An additional \$34 million will be needed for non-radiological decommissioning. The new funding “target” is \$433 million.

On October 17, 2001, due to a “credible threat” against Three Mile Island, the Harrisburg and Lancaster airports were closed for four hours, air travel was restricted in a 20-mile radius, and fighter jets were scrambled around TMI.

“Unit 2 at Three Mile Island has been pronounced worthless in an out of court agreement between its owner, FirstEnergy, and local taxing authorities in Dauphin County.”

“The deal means the plant will be exempt from property taxes after the assessment on the reactor and its contaminated site was reduced from \$16.2 million to zero. Three Mile island 2 has been out of commission since the infamous accident on 28 march 1979. First Energy spokesman Scott Shields said the company considers Units 2 useless and has absolutely no plans for building on the land.” (*Nuclear Engineering International*, April 1, 2005)

