The Dark Side of Nuclear Power\*

By Eric J. Epstein

*In a place far way, not long ago, atomic scientists predicted the*

*dawn of a new day where automobiles would be powered by nuclear fuel*

*and weather could be controlled by atomic clouds. Their high priest*

*promoted nuclear energy as "electricity too cheap to meter.*”

Admiral Lewis L. Strauss, Chairman of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, September 16th, 1954, in a speech by National Association of Science Writer

Well, the fairy tale is baaaaack! Actually it never died, and has been replaying itself in your pocketbook for the last 40 years. Nuclear power never went away, it just devised a snazzier marketing mantra. A little richer and older, but the industry is still peddling the same snake oil: The healing power of nuclear generation.

The industry argues that the problem of greenhouse gases can be solved by building more nuclear power plants which they claim” do not emit green house gasses ...at the *point of production*. What they don’t tell you is what happens to the nuclear wonder pill *before* it is magically transformed into green penicillin.

The nuclear-carbon shell game only works if you ignore the environmental cost on the “front end” and “back end” of nuclear power production. From the moment uranium is mined, milled, enriched, fabricated and transported it releases large quantities of airborne pollutants.

With a nuclear friendly administration in Washington and Harrisburg - but not Wall Street - fanciful myths about nuclear energy abound and multiply. Consumers, taxpayers and citizens have been told that nuclear power deserves a second chance because it is now environmentally friendly. Of course this argument is disingenuous, and ignores the factual reality of nuclear power’s legacy of air pollution, contamination of water resources and long-lived nuclear waste.

The “clean air myth” was demolished on May 13, 1999 when the Nuclear Energy Institute’s advertising campaign was deemed “misleading” by the National Advertising Division of the Better Business Bureau. The specific ad in question was displayed in *The Atlantic Monthly* (December, 1998). The commercial featured a cute owl singing the praises of nuclear power. Hootie then thanked the NEI for clean air. The Business Bureau stated: “The process currently used to produce at least some, if not most, of the uranium enriched fuels that are necessary to power nuclear energy plants emits substantial amounts of environmentally harmful greenhouse gases.” The NEI did not appeal the decision.

When it comes to water consumption, fish kills, thermal inversion and effluent discharges, nuclear plants are water hogs. Nuclear power plants use millions of gallons daily to cool their superheated reactor core. There are three nuclear generation stations on the Susquehanna River. Two plants with three units are located on the Lower Susquehanna, and have the capacity to draw in as much as half the flow of a River in a day.

Production of nuclear fuel creates more terrorist targets, more dependency on Russian fuel, more toxic waste, butless safety, less security and fewer resources for alternative energy development.

Currently there are 80,000 tons high-level radioactive garbage scattered among 72 sites including five de facto nuclear wastes in Pennsylvania. There are over 8,000 metric tons of high-level radioactive waste stored on site in cooling pools and temporary casks in Pennsylvania. The waste is toxic for thousands of years, and has no forwarding address.

Nuclear power’s greenhouse gas “cure” claims must be examined by tracing its fuel cycle. It is clear that the production of nuclear electricity is not “clean”, “green” or “carbon free. ”

Nuclear energy is not the answer. We need to focus on internal sources of energy and deploying renewable energy. We need to view water as a precious resource and limited commodity; not a nuclear subsidy. The next time someone tells you nuclear power does not harm the environment, tell them where they can recycle their “junk science”

\* *Eric Epstein was the Chairman of Three Mile Island Alert, Inc.*, tmia.com, *a safe-energy organization based in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and founded in 1977. TMIA monitors Peach Bottom, Susquehanna, and Three Mile Island nuclear generating stations.*