Nuclear power ads

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Not fooling us

By Charlene LaVoie

WINSTED

A MOUTHPIECE for the nuclear power industry, the U.S. Council for Energy Awareness, is running a self-serving advertising campaign. A recent ad in Time Magazine displays a photo of a huge tree. The ad says that because nuclear plants don't burn anything to make electricity, nuclear plants don't pollute the air.

This assertion is false. Pollute means to contaminate an environment. The routine operation of nuclear power plants contaminates the environment through the release of radioactivity into the air and water. Nuclear plants cannot operate without regular and deliberate releases of radioactive water and gases.

Radioactive gases inside the reactor building must be released into the atmosphere through vents to control the pressure, temperature and humidity and to keep radioactivity from exceeding government limits for workers. This is a routine release of radioactive contaminates into the air.

Nuclear power plants require an enormous amount of water to cool the reactor and are, therefore, usually near bodies of water. Radioactive corrosion sticks to the interior surfaces of the reactor. Some of this radioactive "crud" sloughs off into the reactor's cooling water. Leaks in the fuel rods also enter the cooling water.

Every nuclear power plant has more than 50 miles of pipe through which cooling water circulates. Watch your newspaper – leaks in these pipes occur by the thousands and are frequently reported by the press. In fact, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) permits leaks of contaminated water up to 10 gallons a minute. This radioactive contaminated water seeps into the rivers and oceans.

The nuclear power industry and the NRC justify the routine release of radioactivity in the air and water by telling us that we are exposed to natural background radiation in the environment. While it is true that we cannot lower the natural radiation in the environment, it is not logical to say that it is therefore harmless to increased radiation levels.

A report from the National Research Council tells us that health effects for low-level radiation include the induction of cancer, developmental abnormalities, and some degenerative diseases. There is no such thing as a "safe dose" of radiation. A low dose received slowly causes as many cancers as the same dose delivered all at once.

In June 1990 the International Commission on Radiological Protection recommended more stringent radiation exposure limits for workers. The commission said that new data and new interpretation of older information now indicate with reasonable certainty that the risks associated with radiation are three times greater than estimates of a decade ago.

The nuclear power industry wants us to believe that it does not pollute the air and water with radioactivity unless there is a blow up or melt down. Connecticut citizens, struggling with the problem of radioactive waste, are increasingly aware of the pollution from nuclear power plants.

Safe? Clean? Efficient? Cheap? We have yet to pay the price for nuclear generated power.

For more information on the real cost of nuclear power, write to the Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS), 1424 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 (202) 328-0002. Then let Nancy Johnson and Chris Dodd or Joe Lieberman know that you are concerned.

Charlene LaVoie is Winsted's community lawyer.