



glenn boettcher

fire and rain

John Gofman's talk last week about the dangers of nuclear power and the industry behind it ended in an appropriate irony.

During an unsettling and frightening account of the dangers we face because of nuclear power, Gofman mentioned several observations he has made during his years of opposing nuclear power. Among them was that three times in the last four years a major nuclear plant has been brought to the brink of disaster; during the same number of years hundreds of press releases have been sent to various media explaining burps, puffs and other emissions of radioactive steam into the environment that have always posed no danger to the environment or humans.

"No way," he said, "do all those puffs and burps add up to zero, but that's what we're always told." He went on to describe the way in which officials of nuclear plants explain away the radiation they have released into the environment.

Any doubters in the crowd must surely have seen the light during the question-and-answer period that followed. A member of the audience an-

nounced that news had just come over the radio telling of an incident at the Prairie Island nuclear plant in Red Wing, Minn.

Lo and behold, wire stories explaining the incident in papers the next day fit Gofman's description of how those incidents are handled to a tee. Here are some examples from a United Press International story: "NSP declared a general emergency at the plant 30 miles southeast of Minneapolis-St. Paul at 2:30 p.m. CDT Tuesday when a meter showed a sudden small 'puff' of radioactive gas into the atmosphere. The firm isolated the gas in 27 minutes."

"Officials said the radioactivity was 'very low — below the level dangerous to humans,' and no radioactivity was found outside the plant."

"A small amount of gas trapped in the system when it was isolated filtered out gradually into the night, but an NSP official said the radioactivity was so low workers continued to work in the room where the leak was occurring and it was expected to be sealed early today."

Another official emphasized that, "the emergency system

worked and . . . the radiation released did not pose a public health danger and will not pose one in the future."

After reading about several hundred puffs and burps it is easy to take the words at face value, but that is a mistake. Gofman was quick to emphasize during his talk that we must watch what the nuclear industry does, not what it says.

What it did is quite far from what they said in the article — radioactivity was actually released into the environment, but officials say that emission posed no danger. As per Gofman's description we are left having to take officials of the industry at their words. Not a pleasant position if you are a resident of Red Wing.

If you are a student who has heard a lot about subjects not covered in classes, such as consumer-oriented issues, academic questions or University-related matters, there may be an answer in sight.

You may have to wait a week to get it, but a new column scheduled to appear weekly in the Emerald will try to provide answers to any questions falling

within the broad categories listed above.

Kevin Walker, a third-year Parks and Recreation Management major, has volunteered to track down answers to questions received but there are a few guidelines involved:

- No Dear Abby-type questions.
- All questions submitted will be answered in the column unless space limitations deem

otherwise. However, all questions will be answered personally if the questioner includes a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

- Questions should be sent to the Oregon Daily Emerald, Consumer Column, P.O. Box 3159, Eugene, OR 97403 or dropped by the Emerald office, 301 EMU.

Cooperation urged during emergencies

By PHILIP EMERSON
Of the Emerald

Imagine a truck, loaded with toxic chemicals, overturns on I-5 between Eugene and Springfield, posing a health hazard to residents of both communities.

How to deal with situations like this was the subject of a Seminar on Administration Policy and Public Information sponsored by the city of Eugene last week in the EMU.

City and county representatives discussed with members of the media how to distribute information about a disaster rapidly and accurately and how to insure cooperation between officials and the media.

"Our concern is that people know that there is a plan created by expertly trained people in county government to deal with a disaster situation, that they should stay off the streets, not panic, and should turn on the radio or television for information," said Carol Baker, seminar coordinator and Eugene community relations director.

"We also make it our job to assure that the information they need is there for them."

"In a situation like this (a public emergency) the press abandons its adversary rela-

tionship and we all work together as public servants to get the job done," said Peter Spear, KEZI television station representative.

Media spokespeople and local authorities discussed some of the problems which are likely to arise between the two in emergency situations.

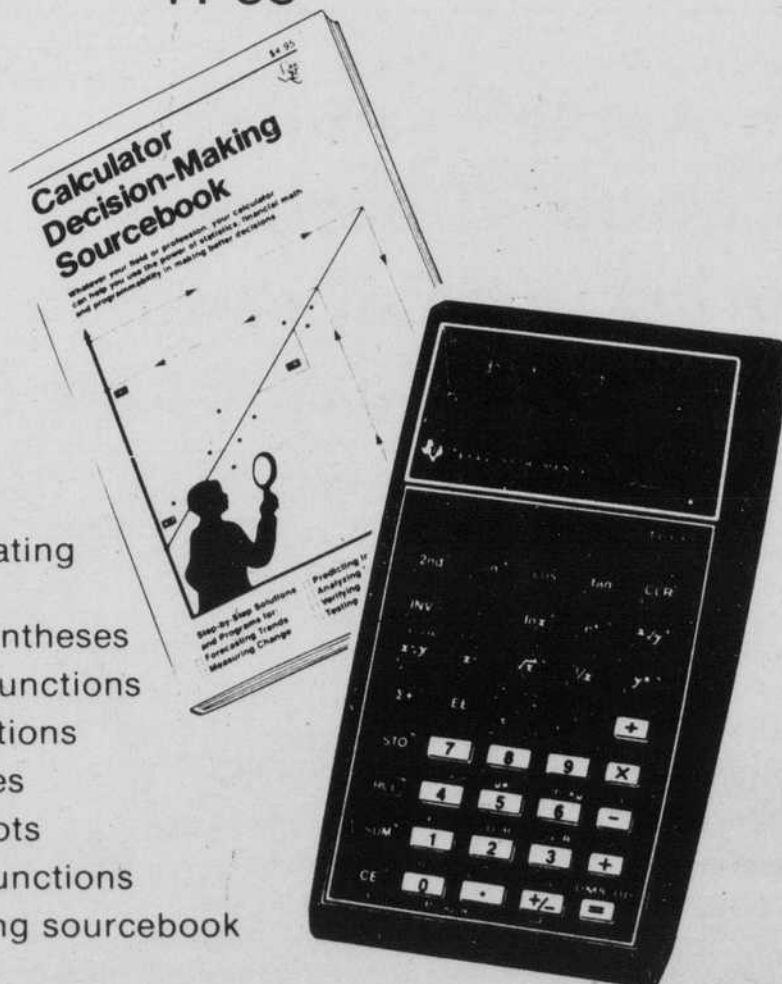
In the case of the press, one problem is access to current, accurate information. Authorities, on the other hand, often find themselves dealing with members of the press who are getting in the way while trying to do their job.

An example cited was the recent DC-10 crash in Portland. Members of the media arrived at the scene of the crash before emergency vehicles and abandoned their cars, blocking access for fire and ambulance crews.

"That was just stupid," said Spear. "And it points to the need for education on both sides. We're certainly not in the business of getting in the way."

Media representatives also discussed ways to cooperate with each other, taking into account the limitations imposed by their respective formats, to provide the best coverage.

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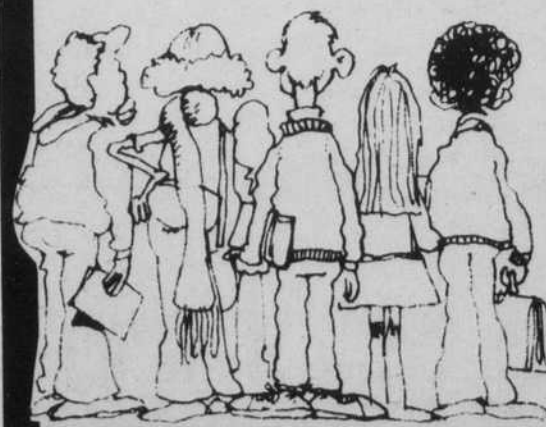
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