

Truth trickling in on Hanford radiation

After 40 years the U.S. government has finally admitted that people living near the Hanford nuclear weapons plants were exposed to dangerous amounts of radiation between 1944 and 1947.

A study released last week by a panel of scientific and technical experts states that one in every 20 people absorbed "significant" amounts of radiation. For the three years ending in 1947 the plant's officials secretly authorized the release of the largest amounts of radiation ever made public.

The current level of radiation considered safe by the Department of Energy (DOE) is .025 rads. A rad is a measure of radiation equal to what is absorbed in about a dozen chest X-rays. The study revealed that 5 percent of the population surrounding the Richland, Wash. nuclear plant received as much as 33 rads of radiation, or about 1,200 times the currently-recognized safe dose.

How much has the government known and how long have it known it?

In 1972 the Atomic Energy Commission, predecessor of the DOE, discovered that underground tanks were leaking millions of gallons of the most radioactive wastes. By the mid-1980s, some residents of the small towns east of the plant started becoming ill from thyroid diseases. Others were dying.

The problem is evident. The United States was in such a hurry in the late 1940s to devise weapons that would end World War II, there wasn't time to test the safety of the procedures used to manufacture the weapons. Americans were so caught up in the wave of patriotism, and the fear of Nazism, that possible effects of radiation were the last thing on anyone's mind.

But World War II has been over for more than 40 years and the government remains remarkably hushed on the effects of radiation. The government released documents in 1986 confirming that radioactive iodine from Hanford reached the civilian population in the region, but not until last week's revelations did officials admit that the levels were potentially harmful.

Unfortunately, those most vulnerable to the radioactive iodine were children because they drank milk from cows that ate contaminated grass. These infants probably received the largest exposure to the iodine, also. It is estimated that approximately 20,000 babies were born in the affected region between 1944 and 1960.

It's amazing how quick the United States built atomic weapons when it needed them. It's just as amazing how slow it has been in releasing information regarding the effects of iodine radiation. It's especially disheartening when the amount of iodine radiation released during the late 1940s was 26,000 times the amount released during the Three Mile Island nuclear accident in Pennsylvania in 1979.

But the real clincher in this ordeal is the government's announcement that it will not be responsible for human disorders resulting from the radiation release. Those affected by the release of radiation will not be able to sue the government. At the very least, the government owes free medical testing and care to those who might have been affected by radiation leaks.



Life overrated

In response to Belinda Beck's letter "Violence" (*ODE* July 12) I say the right to life is overrated. Perhaps if we were not so afraid of death, so afraid in general, then we would not be so eager to oppress those people who pose a threat to our psycho-cultural, racial security.

The oppressed majority of South Africans are under physical assault. Violence comes not only as the brutality of police, but as enforced economic immobility, squalid living conditions and, if the white extremists had their way, as absence of hope as well. If Belinda Beck is saying that a person beaten down should not raise a fist in anger, than Belinda Beck is wrong. A woman being raped should attack her assailant, not teach him with her passivity. Perhaps at moments, passivity has been too pure.

The South African people are being raped by their government. They are also fighting back along with other oppressed peoples of the world. They are fighting for their lives; lives in which the right to life is worth living.

Matthew Miller
History

Bush no friend

Campaign rhetoric to the contrary, President Bush has proved himself no friend to environmental concerns. In the past few weeks he has sabotaged the enactment of the Endangered Species Act with reference to the spotted owl and he has used his influence to postpone international steps to reduce global warming.

He has earned a title other than that of "Environmental President." I suggest this be commemorated by sending him empty letters addressed to: The Extinction President, George

Bush, The White House, Washington, D.C. 20500

Andrew Thompson
Counseling Center

Morality

Deborah Frisch argues (*ODE*, July 3) that homosexuality is not a moral issue, but merely one of the harmless differences of a diverse humanity. In essence, her viewpoint seems like a sort of "no harm, no foul" theory of morality. This theory is attractive, but on closer examination, problems arise.

Who decides what constitutes harm? What about a man, for instance, who doesn't think that his sexual aggressiveness really hurts women? Is he wrong if he doesn't think he is? Why?

What about people who don't care if they harm others as long as they get what they want? The Marquis de Sade believed that because nature made him stronger than women and gave him strong sexual desires, he had a natural right to use women as he pleased. Was he wrong or merely different? Why?

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky observes, "if there is no God, everything is permitted." This is deeply true. Without universal moral reference points, we can know nothing

with certainty. Left to invent our own individual standards of morality, we can justify anything if it fulfills our perceived needs or our desires. The moral ugliness and chaos that such relativity produces can clearly be seen in our materialistic, "me first" culture.

Rejecting the moral boundaries given us by our wise and good Creator has not given us the freedom and happiness that it seemed to promise. Instead we have lost needed protection from human predators, and have polluted ourselves and our culture with our greed, lust and selfishness.

William Moore
School of Music

Not private

By classifying homosexual practice as an inherently private practice, Deborah Frisch shows that she has evidently never been around during Gay Pride Week when they creep out of their closets to subject us to a raucous verbal assault, nor did she read the letters to the *ODE* protesting the gay graffiti which was a black eye on the face of our campus.

Earl Gosnell
Eugene

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The *Emerald* reserves the right to edit any letter for length or style.