

# Greenpeace Goes To Hanford

by Katrin Bridget Snow

Hanford, Washington, long a focal point for antinuclear activists, is now a target for that international environmental activist group best known for its daring on the high seas, Greenpeace.

Greenpeace sent the sloop Alcyon upriver to Hanford in July, and by now has completed its sampling of sludge, fish and waterfowl in a new series of tests for the presence of radioactive isotopes. The purpose of the tests, said Greenpeace project coordinator Tom Buchanan, is to study the effects of cumulative radiation, particularly as it makes its way up the food chain. "We feel that the Battelle Institute, when they did their earlier studies, were taking more samples along the channel and more active regions," explained Buchanan before the trip, "and not around the backwaters and the wetlands and the eddies where there's more radioactivity that will deposit and not wash down the Columbia. . . . We feel that any radioactivity that we might measure in those areas will be critical to people's own food chain."

Since its arrival in Astoria July 5, Greenpeace has organized rallies and direct action aimed at catalyzing public involvement and a commitment to a plan to clean up the Hanford nuclear waste dump. The plan emphasizes closing the PUREX plant and the N-reactor, stopping leakage of radioactive waste, and instituting immediate independent monitoring of all liquid and gas effluents on site. The foremost goals of Greenpeace, however, center on public awareness: catalyzing citizen involvement in a River Watch campaign for the transfer of nuclear waste, and pressuring Rockwell management for detailed information of leaks, spills or dumps of hazardous waste.

Greenpeace has requested a cumulative index of low-level waste that has migrated off-site in the forty-five years of Hanford's operation. Buchanan said that they had received no communication back, but what they have received is a stated willingness on the part of Rockwell to work with Greenpeace in their testing. A letter from Buchanan to Mike Lawrence at Hanford indicated that Lawrence had offered on-site assistance from the U.S. Department of Energy. Buchanan's letter requested that the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Geological Survey and the National Academy of Sciences also be invited to assure independent, unbiased results. "We're engaged in a game of cat and mouse," Buchanan said, "to the extent that the people at DOE. . . are doing their own studies, and they're lobbying a soft lobby. They're taking around reports saying everything's fine at the site and that there's no cause for citizens to worry about radioactivity off-site. We think that's completely wrong for an agency to start lobbying for their own cause."

According to the State Department of Ecology in Washington, fifty-four percent of the nation's low-level nuclear waste is now shipped to Hanford for storage. Spent fuel from nuclear reactors in Sweden, France and Japan is stored at the complex, as is the tritium-contaminated waste water from the Three Mile Island accident. Oregon State University studies for plutonium in fish at Alder Slough and Young's Bay show none or negligible levels, said Jim Bergeron of the OSU Extension Service. However, 1977 studies for zinc showed varying low concentrations in salmon from the San Juan Islands to the Southern Oregon border, said Buchanan, zinc that was identified as a product of Hanford. One reason Greenpeace chose to take on the project is that low-level waste has leaked from the holding ponds and made its way ten miles to the river's edge. It traveled to the Columbia through the water table one hundred and fifty feet below ground level, and has raised the level of the water table by one hundred feet in places, said Buchanan.

Though the presence of any significant level of radioactivity in the river would have a predictably disastrous effect on Oregon's economy, Oregon at present is accorded no legal voice in the decision to locate a high-level nuclear waste repository at Hanford. The North Coast Citizen Action for Lasting Security, which has been agitating for legislation to give Oregon a voice, supports the Greenpeace campaign as the catalyst that may accomplish what smaller groups have been unable to achieve on their own.

Greenpeace has the connections to work on a national and international level, as do the federal agencies and large corporations, but many small antinuclear activist organizations do not. Though funded primarily through canvassing, Greenpeace has the money or connections to purchase the kind of scientific equipment and lab analysis that smaller groups cannot. How-

Thomas Gianni



ever, as its strength lies in the dissemination of information or in media events to attract attention from those with the power to effect change, it will then be up to a local public to use the information and influence legislation.

To date, Greenpeace has not contacted members of the Astoria and Clatsop County governments to seek their cooperation or provide them with information about the project. In fact, Astoria City Manager Jim Flint said that he would have liked an explanation as to Greenpeace's specific objectives in Astoria during its five-day stay, and that the group could have received assistance. As both the city council and county commissioners have passed resolutions requesting further information on the suitability of Hanford as a permanent nuclear waste dump before they can endorse the site, Greenpeace has a local base of support for exactly the kind of study it is undertaking. Flint said that seeing the results of those studies could assist the city council in focussing their own questions regarding the repository, and could lead to a more specific resolution or legislation on the local and state levels.

Typically, said Buchanan, Greenpeace has worked with local governments to document the transfer of nuclear waste through their communities to establish nuclear free zones.

Test results will be provided to city and county governments, he said.

The effect those studies have on the local economy and politics depend on what isotopes show up under analysis and how high the levels of radioactivity are. That, in turn, depends on how much money Greenpeace has to do the analysis and therefore how extensive it can be. Nonetheless, the potential impact is tremendous. Local fishermen who aren't worried yet are well aware that findings of significant levels of radioactivity in Columbia River fish could put them out of business, and the same danger holds for other local economies dependent on river water.

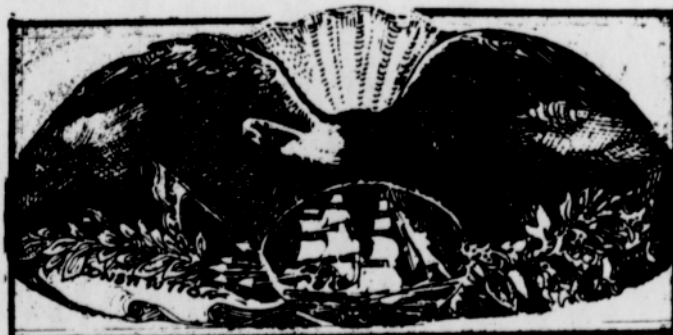
Jim Bergeron is concerned that Greenpeace might not have the scientific background to conduct the studies, and may produce findings disproportionate to the real problems harming local fishermen. Buchanan said that he did not want to create an unnecessary scare, and would like to bring in the fishermen as a group that is concerned to help with the project.

The most immediate avenue for local involvement in the project is the River Watch program which will be coordinated by the North Coast CALS. Individuals will be taught how to recognize trucks carrying low-level waste to Hanford and will document the passage of the trucks on Washington and Oregon highways. It will be, said Buchanan, a way for local people to realize how much nuclear waste is passing through their cities and counties, when, and what the risks are to the communities. It will bring the problems of nuclear waste disposal at Hanford closer to home.

Test results from the samples taken by Alcyon crewmembers are expected back in the fall. At that point, how much impact the Greenpeace project can make will depend in large measure on what local citizens decide to do with the information. Already some face penalties for their involvement with Greenpeace; having chosen civil disobedience to stop trucks on their way to Hanford, several persons including Isa Hessel of Astoria, Ken Vance-Borland of Tolovana Park, and Nola Lamken of Cannon Beach, face a maximum penalty of ninety days in jail and a one thousand dollar fine for disorderly conduct. Greenpeace has requested a trial by jury and is awaiting a response.

The Greenpeace campaign marks a new phase in local activism, both as a larger, experienced organization with international media attention, and in involving communities that are physically removed from Hanford and have had no previous avenue to have a direct impact on nuclear waste disposal but have a great stake in the problem — communities that do not receive any of the economic benefits from defense contractors but can be crippled by a sudden accident or by ongoing negligence.

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