

NEWS Briefs

NUCLEAR WORRIES CONTINUE

Japan's tragic earthquake and tsunami brought damaging high water to the Oregon Coast last week, but the disaster continues to hit close to home as Oregonians wonder if the aftereffects of the earthquake will also include nuclear contamination.

There is very little danger of radiation from the plants in Japan reaching the U.S. at harmful levels, according to a White House update by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission March 14. But studies have shown that mercury and other toxic and particulate emissions from coal-fired power plants in China ride on winds to Oregon. So despite reassurances from the NRC, concerns remain that radiation will also be carried on winds to the U.S.

Local and national media are reporting on consumers buying up supplies of potassium iodide, a common salt that is believed to prevent thyroid cancer from radiation poisoning. Potassium iodide saturates the thyroid gland with non-radioactive iodine, reducing how much dangerous radioiodine the gland can absorb. There have also been increased sales of Geiger counters and emergency preparedness kits, according to amazon.com

Does the Northwest's nuclear danger come from Japan or from the Hanford nuclear site on the Columbia River?

"The Japanese reactor crisis has important implications for the Northwest," according to Gerry Pollet of Heart of American Northwest, a citizen's advocacy group working on issues related to Hanford.

Fukushima nuclear plant's reactor 3, one of the reactors that exploded, used controversial MOX, or mixed oxide fuel, usually made of uranium and plutonium reprocessed from spent uranium. That spent uranium is sometimes a result of the disposal of weapons-grade plutonium, and the rods are hotter, more volatile and more toxic than other nuclear fuels.

Pollet says documents recent unveiled by Freedom of Information Act requests have shown Energy Northwest has been "formally evaluating the potential use of MOX fuel" in the company's single nuclear reactor at Hanford, the Columbia Generating Station, (aka the WPPSS 2 reactor, pronounced "whoops 2"). Heart of America Northwest says, "Trucking weapons grade plutonium to Hanford ... has very high security and accident risks."

For those worried about contamination from Japan, Eugeneans with Geiger

counters can post radiation updates to EW's Facebook page and Twitter. Detailed maps of surface and upper air current levels from Japan to the U.S. are available at <http://wkly.ws/11m>

For more information on Hanford, go to www.hoanw.org and for daily updates on the nuclear situation in Japan, go to www.iaea.org — *Camilla Mortensen*

IS OSU'S REACTOR VULNERABLE?

With nuclear reactors in Japan exploding and melting down after a massive earthquake and tsunami, could a similar nuclear disaster happen here?

The closest nuclear reactor to Eugene is OSU's very small research reactor in Corvallis. OSU officials claim the facility is totally safe. But nuclear officials in Japan said the same thing about their facilities before men in moon-suits began wandering Japanese toddlers with Geiger counters.

Judging by a Safety Analysis Report OSU filed with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in 2004 (with large sections blacked out), the chance of a nuclear emergency in Corvallis does appear to be extremely low, but not impossible.

"Failure of the reactor tank and loss of the coolant in the event of a very large earthquake have been considered ... and the consequences found acceptable from the standpoint of public safety," the OSU report states.

The report examined what it considered a worst case scenario: "In this scenario, the entire north wall of the reactor room instantly vanishes. No credible cause for this occurrence can be imagined."

The OSU report calculated the maximum radiation exposure inside or nearby the campus building of such a scenario as about 500 mrem. The report said that's below federal safety limits.

But such limits may not represent an acceptable risk from the general public's perspective — 500 mrem is equivalent to about 50 chest X-rays in a few minutes. Fear of cancer from such a release could cause widespread panic or evacuations and render billions of dollars of property at OSU and in Corvallis functionally unusable. The OSU report appears to make no effort to balance such public risk, however remote, against the likely public benefit of a research reactor located in a populated area.

The OSU report also appears to only consider smaller earthquakes than other disaster preparedness reports consider possible for the area. The report cites magnitude 6 earthquakes in the past 150 years in Oregon and cites data indicating a maximum earthquake acceleration of the Corvallis area of .38g.

By comparison, the Haiti earthquake that killed about 100,000 was a magnitude 7 quake with a .5g acceleration.

A Benton County Multi-Hazard Mitigation plan from 2006 found "earthquakes on the Cascadia Subduction Zone may have magnitudes of 8 or greater, with probable recurrence intervals of 500 to 800 years."

SLANT

- Kudos to the Eugene City Council and Mayor Kitty Piercy for voting to proceed with the **west Eugene EmX**. But this vote for public transportation shouldn't have been so close. We expected conservatives on the council to vote against the EmX, but we were surprised to see continued opposition to greener, cheaper and more equitable transportation from two councilors on the left. Their arguments make no sense. Lots of bus drivers with little buses stuck in traffic everywhere will cost much more than EmX, and EmX will do far more to help businesses by reducing traffic snarl than it will do to hurt them. Perhaps these south Eugene councilors will redeem themselves and support the future of mass transit in the next EmX vote.

- The **Japanese nuclear meltdowns** should put an abrupt halt to calls for more nuke plants in the U.S., but it won't. Like peace advocates, those with nuclear concerns in this country have no political party. Both Obama and the Republican right wing are gung ho for war and nukes. Scores of billions of dollars in subsidies for a nuclear industry that makes no economic sense are Obama's and the Republicans' primary response to global warming. There's hardly any talk of conservation anymore. Germany uses about half the electricity per person as the U.S. and has an efficient economy that's roaring through the recession.

Coincidentally, the UO just hosted a panel discussion on the dangers and high costs of our aging U.S. nuclear power infrastructure at the recent Public Interest Environmental Law Conference (see News Briefs). Adding to the coincidence was the "Nuke Info Night" event March 7 at Harris Hall calling for a transition from nuclear to solar and other safe energy sources.

But our immediate focus should be on helping the people of Japan recover from this catastrophe. To contribute to relief efforts in Japan, contact Save the Children at <http://wkly.ws/11j> or the International Medical Corp at <http://wkly.ws/11k> or text "REDCROSS" to 90999 to donate \$10 to the Red Cross from your cell phone bill account. We also see at KMTR.com that UO students associated with the Japanese Student Organization have put up a website SendaiEarthquakeRelief.org to coordinate information sharing, education and fundraising efforts locally. Regionally, the Portland Japanese Garden now has a memorial and information center set up on its grounds.

- **Worried about radiation** drifting to Oregon from Japan? You don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows, but you might need a surfer. Check out the surfers' wind pattern website at <http://wkly.ws/11l> Meanwhile, Oregon radiation levels are being monitored carefully by our scientific community, including people here at UO. Right now we have more to worry about from all the toxic crap that unregulated Chinese industries have been pumping into our atmosphere for years. We're downwind.

- One of our local so-called **neo-Nazis**, Jimmy Marr, and his friends are getting attention on the Portland Independent Media Center website. Marr, known for his bizarre behavior at Pacifica Forum events last year, has reportedly been hanging out around the Whitaker neighborhood, raising Nazi salutes in his Scottish kilt as he did at Pacifica Forum, giving the old tartan a bad name.

It's irritating to see Eugene once again branded as a vortex that sucks in crackpots and extremists, but perhaps we need regular reminders that destructive ideologies are lurking all around us, looking for fertile ground in which to grow. Whether you are an offended Scot or not, you can join the lively discussion at <http://wkly.ws/11i> and the site lists an email contact for the Eugene chapter of the Anti-Racist Network: emeraldcityara@gmail.com Comments can also be posted on our Facebook page.

- Death isn't cheap. The state of Oregon will spend millions and millions of dollars prosecuting and defending and judging **Angela McAnulty to death**. It's tempting to say McAnulty deserves the costly ultimate penalty for the heinous torture and murder of her daughter. An execution gives the public the satisfaction of revenge, ambitious prosecutors a boost of publicity and tabloid media bleeding headlines. But beyond that, a better memorial for the slain child would be to let McAnulty rot in jail for life and spend the millions on preventing child abuse. With funding for such programs now threatened, choosing to spend heavily on death for the guilty rather than saving the lives of the innocent is criminal.

- **Need a little fun** in the midst of all this gloomy news? Check out Molly Templeton's reports from the South By Southwest music convention on our blog this week at <http://blogs.eugeneweekly.com> Our intrepid longtime film critic and former music editor is now living in New York City, but she continues to write for us every week. She's been in Austin for SXSW for several days now and writes, "It's debauchery and inspiration in nearly equal parts, with a side order of aggravation. And I love it."

SLANT includes short opinion pieces, observations and rumor-chasing notes compiled by the EW staff. Heard any good rumors lately? Contact Ted Taylor at 484-0519, editor@eugeneweekly.com

lighten up

If the thrice-married Newt Gingrich becomes president will his current wife be called the Third Lady?

— Rafael Aldave, Eugene