



NUCLEAR FREE TIMES

For a safe and sound energy future

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Redwood Alliance Supports Renewables

Redwood Alliance and other members of the Sustainable Energy Budget Coalition asked President Clinton to make good his threat to veto the Interior and HUD/VA Appropriations Bills. In addition, they called upon Congress to reverse the deep cuts it has made in 1996 sustainable energy program budgets.

Efforts of Congressional leaders and their corporate supporters threaten to destroy the sustainable energy industry and prevent further advances. Our government seems to prefer sending Americans to war to protect foreign supplies of oil and opening the environmentally sensitive Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and gas drilling.

Congress' pointed attack on the renewables industry would eliminate or severely restrict almost every program, while the nuclear industry barely gets cut. Tax credits and rebate programs for renewables would suffer, while tax breaks and credits for the fossil fuel industry remain intact.

Cost-effective support of both energy efficient and renewable energy

technologies have reduced projected energy use by over 30% since 1975 and renewable energy has climbed to provide about 10% of our nation's energy production. Over the past two decades, these technologies have experienced significant price drops and in many cases are cost-competitive with and even cheaper than conventional energy sources.

Continued reliance on fossil and nuclear fuels poses health, environmental, and economic risks. Global warming is real. Reliance on foreign oil removes a lot of money from our nation's economy. Radioactive waste continues to pile up at our nuclear power plants and disposal facilities. Coal and oil burning continues to clog the air we breathe with pollutants. The Pentagon is continually poised to go to war to keep foreign oil flowing.

Call the President today at (202)456-1414 with your support for renewable energy projects. Ask him to promote a 1997 budget that restores sustainable energy programs to former levels.

Ward Valley Waste Dump Gets Presidential Veto!

Who Knows What the Future Will Bring!

by Jim Adams

President Clinton released 82 reasons for vetoing the Republican budget. One reason was the controversial rider to transfer federal land at Ward Valley in southeastern CA to the State of California. The transfer would allow the construction of a radioactive waste dump near the Colorado River.

"The Clinton Administration has taken a strong position on an important issue that affects Californians", said Jim Adams, former Redwood Alliance staff person and Senior Analyst of the

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Late-Breaking News: Ward Valley Nuke Dump Delayed

At press time we learned the DOI ordered a new environmental study of the 1,000-acre desert tract near the Colorado River, and additional tests for the presence of tritium, a radioactive isotope already discovered 100 feet below the site. Officials believe that this will delay movement on the dump for about a year while long overdue tests and the studies are completed.

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Safe Energy Communication Council. "Despite attempts to sneak an inappropriate rider into the Balanced Budget Act of 1995, President Clinton has wisely vetoed the Republican budget in part because the Ward Valley transfer would 'bypass good science'."

The language to transfer the land would have waived all federal safeguards the Clinton Administration has sought in negotiations with the State of California, including additional tests recommended by a panel from the National Academy of Sciences and limits on plutonium, total waste volume, radioactivity, monitoring, and related operational issues. The Governor of California and other state officials have refused to carry out the tests.

"We urge the President to hold the line. President Clinton and his budget negotiators should remain steadfast in their conviction," concluded Adams.

It appears that some members of the Clinton Administration want to delay any action regarding the land transfer until after the election. They are considering conducting new tests and starting a Supplemental EIS. Either one or both actions would take several months to complete. On the other hand, some Clinton officials want this project to move forward.

It may be that if Clinton is re-elected, Vice President Gore's staff will be making more of the decisions on environmental issues like Ward Valley. This is worrisome since many on Gore's staff do not understand the problems concerning Ward Valley, appreciate the depth of public opposition, or care enough about the issue. Of course if a Republican is elected as President, the land transfer will probably occur soon after the elections.

There has been no known further attempts to pass legislation via a rider on a budget bill or other legislation that would force DOI to transfer the land. White House and DOI staff are opposed to such a maneuver. Senator Boxer's Washington office is watching for any such attempts in the Senate.

A "stand-alone" transfer bill could be filibustered, but a rider to a budget reconciliation bill could still get through the Senate. Given President Clinton's inclusion of the Ward Valley land transfer in his veto message regarding the first budget bill, it is reasonable to think his staff would insist that any language on the land transfer be dropped from a new budget bill.

However, with politics, anything is possible. We only know that we need to hold their feet to the fire on this and other important energy issues.

More Problems at Diablo & Humboldt

Lately PG&E has been spending a lot of time and ratepayer funds telling us how well they are doing. Yet, both public sentiment and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) have been telling different stories!

In its biennial update sent to Humboldt County ratepayers (see Humboldt Nuke on page 3), PG&E had only good to say about itself. And in a barrage of free and paid publicity, the utility gave itself kudos for having done a good job repairing damages from this winter's huge wind storms.

But, a January 4, 1996, NRC inspection report from the Humboldt Bay Nuclear Power Plant showed that PG&E had been negligent by releasing radioactive water into Humboldt Bay. An under-trained technician with potentially too many duties had repeatedly overridden plant safety equipment to perform routine maintenance.

The previous year, PG&E had requested and received permission to cut back on staffing at the plant in order to save money. But now, it appears that the decreased staff at the plant cannot do it all. Not only are technicians required to watch over the operating fossil fuel powered plants, but they also

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A Letter From Michael to Our Friends

My friends often tell me how much they appreciate the work Redwood Alliance does for the community and the environment. The thanks are appreciated and go a long way toward offsetting the low wages and long hours that come with a career choice of activism.

Still, a lot of folks have become complacent about what's happening in our world. This isn't surprising, considering the formidable tasks at hand and the lack of interest and truth com-

ing from media and government.

Every day we see successes that lead my thoughts toward a clean, safe, and just future. Are you people hearing of those things? I think not, otherwise more of you would be getting deeply involved in public interest projects that are important to you.

I'd like to give those of you who are a bit overwhelmed by failures and underwhelmed by success an opportunity to feel that you are making a con-

tribution. And believe me, it feels pretty darn good to participate in the success as well as the effort.

I am asking for your help. Just one day a month, or a couple hours a week would do a world of good. Just as important would be a few committed individuals willing to get down and dirty and become one of our directors, helping to shape the future of RA.

We're looking forward to your call. Thanks, Michael Welch

Humboldt Bay Nuclear Power Plant - What PG&E doesn't tell you...

Once again, PG&E has mailed out their biennial *Humboldt Bay Power Plant Update*. It contains the deceptions and half-truths we've become used to from the world's largest investor-owned utility.

This report to the public is required by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and, is paid for by utility ratepayers (us). Apparently, the NRC has no rules for including the truth in the contents of these reports because PG&E seems to be allowed to include misinformation and deception.

Since PG&E first announced that it intended to build the nuke plant, it has been less than forthcoming with the citizens of Eureka and Humboldt County. They ignored the needs and safety of our communities in favor of shoving an environmental and economic nightmare down our throats. They continue to give us no reason to believe they will change.

The mega-utility's *Update* claims that the nuclear power plant ran efficiently and economically. The statement would be funny, except for the seriousness of the problems perpetrated upon us and the environment. Polls show that most of the public believes that nuclear power plants are inherently unsafe. The Humboldt Bay Nuclear Power Plant was the worst of the lot. The only way PG&E could make it run at all was to frequently ignore problems at the plant. There are many solid examples of this:

When an employee tried to expose NRC rules violations, PG&E's answer was to fire him, publicly humiliate him, and, according to the victim, threaten his and his family's well-being. When PG&E's off-site releases of radioactivity exceeded legal amounts, the utility's solution was to remove radiation monitors so that further infractions would not be discov-

ered. When the plant's radiation leakage problems earned it the title of "dirtiest plant in the nation" (Science Magazine), PG&E's answer was to ask the NRC to increase its allowable radiation releases. PG&E's Humboldt Bay Nuclear Power Plant led the nation in both off-site releases of radiation and worker exposure to radiation. Yet to this day, they continue trying to paint a "smiley face" on our nuclear nightmare.

PG&E's *Update* goes on to state that the utility's decision to not reopen the plant was based on economic reasons and because of new seismic standards. That's a back-handed way of skating the truth. Actually, PG&E tried very hard to deny the existence of the earthquake faults located near the plant. Time after time, the NRC rejected PG&E's seismic "studies" as inadequate. Finally, PG&E gave up because there was absolutely no way the plant could be made earthquake safe without completely rebuilding it. Even

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have to watch over and deal with both the high level and low level radioactive waste at the plant site.

In a January 26 press release, the NRC also announced it was fining PG&E \$50,000 for violations at their Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant. Once again, PG&E personnel ignored established procedures in their work, resulting in failure of power to one of their reactors. Fortunately, emergency backup generators started, restoring power to the facility.

But the problem is one that Redwood Alliance has been talking about for twenty years. PG&E, as a corporation more concerned with making a profit than anything else, is not capable of taking care of something so delicate

California's Public Utility Commission agreed, though they are well known for giving the utility what it wants. They would not let PG&E charge us ratepayers the money the utility spent in trying to reopen the plant because there was no reasonable way to reopen it.

The section in PG&E's *Update* about the SAFSTOR decommissioning method was pretty accurate. But the public needs to know that the facility just south of Eureka has become a de facto long-term storage site for high level nuclear waste. This may be forever, folks. Many experts in nuclear power believe that our Federal government will never come up with a repository to permanently store the high level nuclear waste that our nation's nuke plants produce.

The *Update* then goes on to say that there is "virtually no risk to the public". The addition of the word "virtually" in front of the word "no" means

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and dangerous as a nuclear power plant.

The utility is "down-sizing" staff wherever it can, just to make more profits. It has already effected contamination of Humboldt Bay. Their gutting of emergency maintenance response teams has created problems for those of us not directly affected by their nuclear power plants.

After this winter's windstorms, maybe you were fortunate in getting your power restored quickly because you lived in a major area, but there were tens of thousands that lived without electricity for many days. Some were without power for weeks.

This can be blamed on the utility's cost cutting and down-sizing. We can only hope that it doesn't effect the utility's continued operation of Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant.

that they cannot really say there isn't a risk. I will grant them that the chance of a major release of radiation may be slight, but it is real nevertheless. The big earthquake, when it arrives, could certainly cause the collapse of either their tall release stack, or the 200 ton condenser suspended from the wall, onto the spent fuel pool. Both of these items loom above the pool. If the reactor fuel rods in the pool become disturbed badly enough, they could become configured in such a way as to begin an uncontrolled nuclear reaction which would release clouds of radioactive steam into the environment. That is the worst-case-scenario. At best, such a catastrophe would result in worker exposure to deadly radiation during an extensive, expensive, and difficult cleanup process.

By the way, the word "spent" fuel is a gross misnomer. It is really "irradiated" fuel containing new, dangerous radioactive material including plutonium, the deadliest substance known to humans.

The *Update* then goes on to quote a PG&E staff person who would have us believe there is no danger from an earthquake. But right in the middle of the quote, he claims "that the plant is not astride an active fault." The public needs to know that even PG&E's own "Environmental Report for the Decommissioning of Humboldt Bay Power

Plant" shows that there is an earthquake fault directly below the plant site. Geologists studying earthquake potential have told Redwood Alliance that the Little Salmon Earthquake Fault may in fact be under the site, but at a minimum is in close proximity to the plant.

The Little Salmon Fault is capable of producing a greater than 8.0 earth movement at the plant site. Studies show that fault has a history of going off three times in the last 1700 years, yet hasn't released any pressure in 260 years. That means another big one could happen any time. It is not a matter of "if" it will happen, but "when."

What we're talking about is the biggest earthquake in California's recorded history happening a couple of miles south of Eureka. This one is likely to devastate Eureka, yet PG&E wants us to believe their plant is immune to the effects of such a catastrophe. The Little Salmon's importance is further demonstrated by being the main fault studied for Humboldt County's Earthquake Planning Scenario, since its potential is so hazardous.

Are we to believe that PG&E will change its tune and tell the truth? We hope so, but for now we must go by their past deeds and their recent weak attempts at placating the public. We must push them to deal with the waste safely. And we hope that the big earthquake and its resulting tsunami don't

occur while radioactive waste is still stored in the reactor building.

Redwood Alliance's mission is to create a safe, clean, renewable energy future for us all. A component of that is to challenge non-renewable technologies like nuclear. Since 1978, we have been our community's representative in watch-dogging the nuke plant. Mostly we have found ourselves in the position of fighting against PG&E's plans, but now we offer a viable solution to the storage of high level radioactive waste at the plant.

We propose that the utility take all the high level waste and store it on site (outside the reactor building) in casks specially designed for the irradiated fuel. That way, the waste can be removed from the reactor building that's not built to withstand the earthquake that eventually could decimate it.

Redwood Alliance has proposed this Dry Cask Storage technology to PG&E more than once, yet the utility has been unwilling to seriously consider that option. Like the nuclear industry as a whole, they are remiss to admit there are any problems with nuclear power. Publicly, PG&E says the reason is how much money it would cost. But even with a one-time cost of between 10 and 15 million dollars, it would be a drop in the bucket compared to PG&E's other expenses, which include about \$2 million a year, ad infinitum, to guard and monitor the nuke plant and its waste.

Dry Cask Storage would also cancel out two other problems with nuclear power. First, it eliminates the need to transport PG&E's radioactive waste over our often-dangerous roadways. It also removes the possibility of another location being forced to accept the waste in yet another storage facility.

Will PG&E finally come clean with this community? Will it do the right thing? For more information, call Redwood Alliance at 822-7884.

Lawsuit Settled

Writer J.A. Savage has settled her lawsuit with PG&E with an undisclosed agreement. Because of her previous involvement with Redwood Alliance, the mega-utility had her fired from two separate writing jobs with industry trade publications.

Affectionately known by the nickname "Honest," she worked with RA for several years. Honest was mostly

involved in editing and writing for our quarterly newsletter, and worked hard on several CPUC hearings we had become involved in. She is now writing for *California Energy Markets*.

She filed her lawsuit in 1988 in an attempt to make PG&E pay for their injustice. Ms. Savage settled out of court in September before the lawsuit was set to go to trial.

What's Wrong with our Government?

Or, how you can most effectively make a change

The biggest problem with government is not that it is too big (although it definitely is), but rather that it is too unresponsive to the needs and will of the public. We will not see the final end to nuclear power or the emphasis on a safe energy future until we have real political reform.

How can we expect politicians to be responsive to the people when they know that it is big business and the corporations that can provide them with the means to win elections?

Real political reform would limit the size of contributions from individuals, political action committees (PAC), companies, and lobbyists and it would put caps on the amount of spending by candidates.

There is no serious campaign reform law in CA. It is one of seven states that allows politicians to collect as much as they want from the rich and powerful. The need is evident: over 70% of money raised for CA races comes from businesses and their PAC's; 9 out of 10 campaign dollars comes from outside of the candidates' districts; and over 90% of the money raised by CA candidates comes in contributions over \$100.

CALPIRG has begun an initiative process for campaign reform in CA and we urge you to support them.

Their new law, called The California Anti-Corruption Act of 1996, is patterned after those successfully implemented in Oregon, Montana, and Missouri. It would:

- ☞ Limit campaign contributions to what average voters can afford,
- ☞ Restrict influence of out-of-district contributors,
- ☞ Set mandatory campaign

spending limits,

☞ Crack down on lobbyists' influence, and

☞ Limit special interest PAC contributions.

It appears that this initiative can pass if we go out and make it happen. A competing initiative for campaign reform is also being circulated for signatures. The second is not as strong and not as effective as the CALPIRG initiative. If both pass the one with the most votes will become law.

Unfortunately, there is no initiative process on the national level, so we must insist that Congress enact similar legislation. But it is difficult to get those "good old people" to pass laws that would restrict their own gravy train. It is like asking them to pass a significant pay cut. We hope they get the message from the state initiatives.

For further information, call CALPIRG at (916)448-4516.

Utah Phillips "Retires"

In October Utah Phillips announced his retirement from touring and will reduce performances to a minimum. Utah has done several shows for Redwood Alliance and other groups in our area, and he will be sorely missed.

In an open letter to his friends, he cited health reasons for the changes. He had unknowingly had a heart attack, leaving his heart in only partial working order. He had a clear choice of continuing and increasing his risk of early death or slowing considerably.

In typical form, Utah quips, "any number of alternative therapies besides 'western' medicine ... in Nevada City, California, the new-age capital of the western world. There are so many healers here that it makes me sick."

Utah plans to continue writing his songbook and recording with both

Rosalie Sorrels and Ani DiFranco. We are looking forward to his book, as the songs this guy knows should be considered an international treasure. It would be a pity to lose them, as his head is the only place where many of those songs exist. Utah is also considering a talk show and finding new ways to contribute his storytelling.

As you may know, Utah's work and life has been financed by the shows he did. With having to cancel over 50 future gigs, he is hurting for funds. Redwood Alliance encourages you to help him if you can. You can send letters of thanks and support, and even some financial help to him at PO Box 1235, Nevada City, CA 95959. It is time to give back to him the way he has given of himself to us.

Good luck to a fine friend.

Sanity, Long Distance

The opportunity still exists to transfer your long distance carrier to Working Assets Long Distance (WALD), a company that supports progressive organizations and views.

WALD donates a portion of their sales to various nonprofit organizations, and democratically asks customers to help with giving it out. WALD also has a program that allows customers to dial their representatives for free to make sure that they hear from us.

All our phone lines, including those for modeming to the Home Power BBS, are WALD. If you are signed up with WALD, you'll automatically see a 25% discount when you call us.

Call 800-788-8588 to join WALD. Mention Redwood Alliance as the referral and they'll credit us with \$10 on our next bill.

Remember Chernobyl by Helping Victims

This coming April will be the tenth anniversary of the nuclear disaster at the Chernobyl reactor in the former Soviet Union.

Early in November, I happened to be watching television news. I was surprised to hear the correspondent announce that the tragedy at Chernobyl had killed 30 people! Wait a minute, here. The last reports I heard were that deaths were in the thousands, with many expecting the ultimate figure to climb into the tens of thousands!

We cannot let this tragedy slip from our consciousness because of mainstream media's efforts to downplay its significance. Remember Chernobyl, because it could happen here. In fact it almost did at Three Mile Island and Detroit's Enrico Fermi Atomic Power Plant.

It almost happened here at PG&E's Humboldt Bay Nuclear Power Plant. During a nuclear "event" in 1970, a

near-meltdown occurred when the reactor coolant level dropped to within inches of uncovering the core, though nine feet above was the required level.

But, about Chernobyl. The Nuclear Information & Resource Service has announced a program to help the world remember Chernobyl while offering assistance to victims and a program of action. The proposed outline is open to feedback.

First, we need to help alleviate the suffering of Chernobyl victims. As shown by the ignorance of that national newsperson, the world has turned its back on those victims, whose numbers are increasing daily as cancers and new birth defects show up. The point to drive home is that this is a **continuing** disaster.

Second, is making the connection to the potentially hundreds of Chernobyls waiting to happen in the world.

Third, we need to join the world movement against nuclear power.

NIRS is hoping to see hundreds of collection points for victim-relief supplies, including vitamins, food supplements, over-the-counter drugs, and baby food. The supplies will be forwarded to a central warehouse run by Children of Chornobyl (the spelling differs) for distribution to the victims.

Steps need to be taken to make sure the collections make the connection between the Chernobyl tragedy and U.S. nuclear program. NIRS suggests that collection boxes be set up every Friday in front of the local nuclear utility office and other prominent spots. Finally, the whole effort could culminate with a press conference held by each community on April 26.

If you would like to help Redwood Alliance with this project or start your own similar program in your own community, please give us a call.

Home Power Computer BBS

About three years ago, Redwood Alliance started the Home Power BBS with grants from the Unity Avenue Foundation, The Arcata Foundation, and major support from *Home Power Magazine*.

Since then, more than 24,000 phone calls have been logged with most coming from outside of California and many from international users.

A BBS is a tool for using a computer and modem to help find information and exchange ideas. Our BBS concentrates mostly on small-scale, renewable energy, which is a fast growing technology becoming more and more affordable all the time.

The overall philosophy behind the system is that the more that people know about this type of renewable energy, the sooner they will take ad-

vantage of the technology as it becomes affordable for all.

If you have a computer and modem, you can log onto the system by dialing (707)822-8640. Your communications software will allow you to dial in, participate in the message forums, and download files related to renewable energy.

The most popular files on the system are the articles from back issues of *Home Power Magazine*, the "Hands-On Journal of Home-Made Power." This magazine has become the "bible" for people interested in using small-scale renewable energy for powering their homes and businesses.

The system is also available to businesses and non-profits that have a need to communicate electronically with employees, members, or custom-

ers that are out of the area. This is called "tele-commuting," a good method for allowing people to work out of their homes while not incurring significant travel or overnight mail expenses. Gainer and Associates, an Arcata recycling consulting firm, has been using our service for years with excellent results. Since they produce mostly information, the BBS is right up their alley. Call for info on putting your organization on line.

Feel free to dial the BBS, or voice call us for further information.

