

The Nuclear Exchange

Trojan Visit Draws Interest

by Jan Steinman

Six persons took part in the Columbia Group's tour of the Trojan Nuclear Plant near Rainier, Oregon, on Saturday, June 22. Guided by PGE Nuclear Energy Education Specialist Julie Cleveland, our tour lasted over two hours, as Julie's willingness to answer questions extended what would normally be an hour tour.

Julie has a past record of environmental involvement, and her assignment to our group might at first be viewed as a cynical attempt at influence. Certainly, her candid acknowledgment of past and ongoing problems at Trojan took us by surprise, just as her earthy, comfortable clothing somehow made her more believable than if they had given us a "suit" for a guide. But she and the other plant workers we talked with seem utterly sincere in their belief that Trojan can be run safely.

Whether Trojan can be run economically may be another matter. A recent report says that the steam generators are damaged and may need replacement at a cost of \$100 million. According to one of last year's quarterly stockholders' reports, ongoing plant maintenance problems were to a large degree responsible for PGE's record loss of nearly \$100 million last year. PGE's constant assurance that Trojan pro-

vides cheap, reliable electricity should bear careful scrutiny—\$100 million here, \$100 million there, pretty soon, you're talking real money!

I would like to thank Julie for going to extra trouble to allow me to carry a small radiation monitor during the tour. This is an inexpensive Geiger counter type of instrument, similar to the dosimeters carried by all Trojan workers who enter radiation areas as part of their job. Averaged over the period when we were within plant security (about an hour), I measured 56.1 counts per minute, which is about five times the normal background radiation measured at my house. Most of this probably accumulated while we were standing outside the spent fuel storage building, the "hottest" point on the tour.

For comparison, a lantern mantle held in your shirt pocket would give you a localized dose at least twice as high, and airline passengers routinely receive whole body doses nearly ten times as high. Does this make it safe? No. Evidence is building that there is no "threshold effect," or level below which no damage occurs. But we certainly had a much greater risk of dying in an auto accident on the way to the plant than we had of getting cancer from this trip, and we probably did more physical

damage by having a beer afterward.

The problem is not Trojan, nor what might seem the "selling out to the enemy" of our "earth mama" host, nor that of PGE management or stockholders. The problem is with an extractive resource system with numerous, unknown side-effects that was pushed on reluctant utilities by a government bent on nuclear power. Trojan is not a problem; it is a symptom. Uranium mine tailings poisoning poor Native Americans, nuclear fuel industry workers with health problems, the specter of more and more long-term waste—even Julie agreed that these are much more troubling parts of the nuclear power structure. Once the uranium is dug out of the ground, the safest it will be for tens of thousands of years may well be the brief time it spends inside a power plant. This fact in no way vindicates the entire nuclear government-industry complex!

I would also like to thank our group for their interest and participation. Pauline Nathan pulled no punches with her thought-provoking questions about the safety of the plant. Glenda Chamberlain shared some good ideas and is interested in becoming more active in citizen lobbying. I hope all of those on the tour continue their interest and healthy skepticism.

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