

# Psychological effects of TMI

by bob colman

The Harrisburg area has changed since the Three Mile Island accident in late March. People in the region no longer see the man-made world around them as safe. People have a new sense of personal vulnerability.

Pro-nuclear sources are suggesting that the accident is an indication of the safety of nuclear power, not its dangers. They say that this is so because containment was not breached, a full meltdown did not occur, and because there is debate over physical health effects of the relatively low levels of radiation which were emitted.

This position ignores any psychological damage produced by the disaster and its aftermath. In fact, the damage done offsite seems largely to have been psychological. And it is the psychological effects which most interest people from outside the area. Understanding the nature of these effects is critical for understanding the meaning of TMI.

We can draw on disaster literature for help. (Disasters are sudden, unexpected events which damage property and people. By this standard definition, the TMI accident was clearly a disaster.) Psychological damage seems to come from two sources: immediate stress from the disaster's impact itself, and continuing sensitization to the possibility of future disaster.

The stress effects are usually short-lived, if painful. They include depression, irritability, agitation and anxiety. The stress can lead to disruption of work and relationships. The problems people experienced during evacuation fall into this category. (Interestingly, disasters tend to agitate and disrupt people, and not to drive them crazy: anxiety is a more likely result than schizophrenia.)

In Harrisburg, the continuing sensitization effects are the most interesting. People still twitch a bit when they hear the term

"radiation"; they respond quickly and negatively to threats of future radioactive releases from TMI. I hear that outside researchers are beginning to refer to a "Harrisburg hysteria." Why, they seem to ask, is there so strong a reaction here, if the accident was minimal in its immediate impact?

As it happens, the events at TMI could hardly have been better designed to produce long-term sensitization. Three characteristics of the events were particularly important. First, in coming so close to a meltdown, we were exposed to a **near-miss situation**, so that we could imagine all possible scary outcomes from an almost incredibly large threat. Second, we were **all vulnerable**, since radiation respects no high ground. Third, and now perhaps most important, it was a **high-technology accident**, compounded by human error. Since the same people --Met-Ed and the NRC-- show every indication of

planning to use the same high technology, we are exposed to a **continued vulnerability**. And outsiders wonder why local people act concerned?

One additional consideration. Direct stress effects as I said, are usually short-lived. However, there is increasing evidence in the literature of latent traumatic neuroses from disasters. In other words, people can have anxiety symptoms which show themselves in behavior only under additional, later stress. It is for this reason, along with continuing sensitization to threat, that reopening TMI, Unit 1 or 2, would be a serious mental health hazard.

The best corrective for feelings of vulnerability is success in trying to regain control over one's life. Locally, the clearest way to do this is to work successfully to close TMI.

## It's raining cats and dogs

by susan girolami

"Twenty five million cats and dogs are doomed to a cruel fate each year. Nobody wants them. Their fate is death," states a pamphlet for the Friends of Animals Inc. (F of A).

F of A is a nationwide organization that started in 1964. Its main objective is to educate people about reducing the animal population.

It is still getting off the ground with 500 volunteers across the country in about 32 to 35 States.

F of A stresses spaying and neutering as the solution to the problem of unwanted animals. Norma M. Sauer, local volunteer, feels that, "This is the humane thing to do." She adds, "Spaying is better than death."

Many unwanted animals who have no home either end up starving to death, contracting diseases, or are eaten from the inside by worms. Sauer says people are misled if they think the Humane Society will find homes for their pets' unwanted litters. "There just aren't enough good homes," states Sauer.

F of A is helping to solve the problem by first educating the people by showing them that spaying is the answer.

Second, it gives financial help to pet owners who cannot afford to spay their animals. Third, the organization asks that shelters give kittens and pups to only those people who will pay for the animals' spay-

ing in advance. Financial aid is given in this case also.

Last, F of A has corps of volunteers to "teach" people in their communities about the prevention of unwanted pets and the aid available for spaying.

Another gripe with Friends of Animals is the declawing of cats. Declawing can have damaging physical and psychological effects on a cat.

Without their claws, cats have no way of defending themselves. They begin to bite and don't understand the pain they feel when they walk.

Infection can set in or the claw can grow back in an abnormal way. The cat also feels mistrust for his master and veterinarian.

Friends of Animals Inc. is an organization to prevent not only unwanted pets but unwanted cruelty



# Stealing a phone call isn't a game.

Most students play by the rules when placing a long distance call. They take advantage of bargain rates and make their calls during the discount periods. If you're not sure when you can call at discount rates, check your phone book.

A few students think it's O.K. to break the rules by stealing their telephone calls. They're not beating the system, they're taking advantage of all of us, because it drives up the cost of providing telephone service.

Students who break the rules also run the risk of paying a large fine. Spending time in jail. And getting themselves a permanent police record.

It's just not worth it!

 Bell of Pennsylvania

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