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Campus Remembers TMI Accident

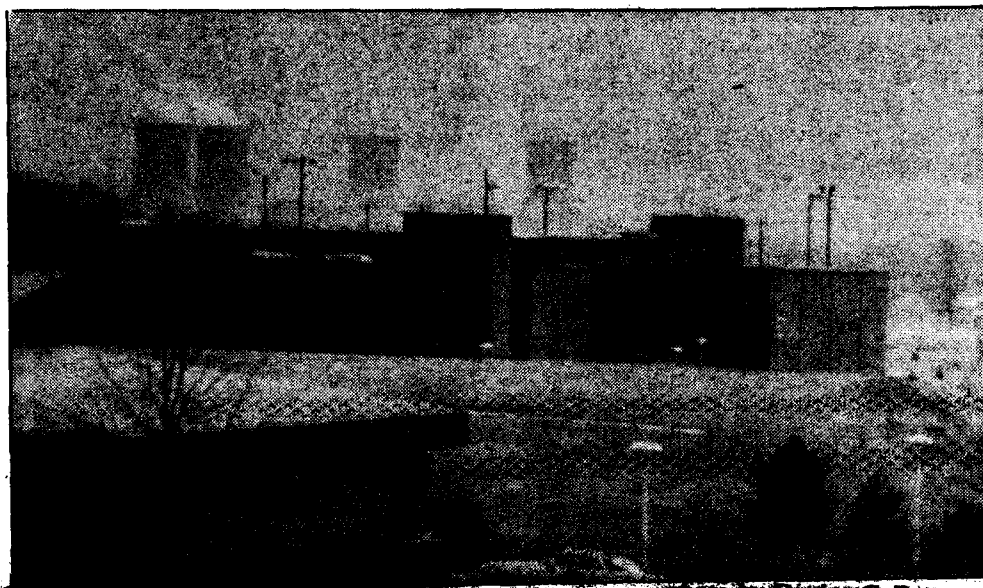
By Mary Lee Schnable

Just south of the Penn State Harrisburg campus, large pillars of white steam pump steadily from the cooling towers of Three Mile Island's Unit One nuclear reactor. They can be seen for miles.

Nearby, the cooling towers of what was once the Unit Two reactor are quiet, but the nuclear accident that took place there ten years ago is still a source of controversy and concern.

Television programs, panel discussions, anti-nuclear demonstrations, and a renewed interest by press from near and far are planned to mark the tenth anniversary of the accident, during which a portion of the uranium fuel in the core of the reactor melted, causing a buildup of radioactivity in and around the plant.

WITF Television plans to air a series discussing the implications of the accident, and on the campus of PSH a panel of researchers from PSH and Penn State University Park will gather to discuss various technical and sociological aspects of the accident. Three Mile Island Alert, an anti-nuclear group, will hold ceremonies at the State Capitol and near the entrance to the plant, and will distribute publications addressing nuclear power and TMI.



A view of TMI from Olmsted Building

photo by Debra C. Benson

Some people around PSH recalled the controversy and confusion that prevailed once information about the accident became public.

"You almost had to have been an intimate part of it to see the confusion ...the contradictory information," said Dr. James D. South, who was the Director of Student Affairs at the time, and one of the last people to leave the campus after an evacuation was ordered.

The situation really began quietly, South said. As he pulled into the Dickenson College parking lot for a meeting that morning a low key news report gave only a hint of what was to come. By the time he returned to PSH that afternoon, South said, "things had started to bubble."

Charles Aleksy, Supervisor of Safety and Police Services for PSH, said he was alerted at 11:30 a.m. that there

was a "problem" at TMI. Once an additional notice to stand-by was received, Aleksy said, the administration decided to evacuate the campus, rather than wait for a general evacuation notice.

One of the dangers during the accident, Aleksy said, was that a hydrogen bubble had formed in the reactor. "They (officials at TMI) wanted it to decrease, not burst," he said, since bursting could cause a blow-up.

Sharon Camasi, presently a senior majoring in Humanities/Business, said she was scheduled to return to work at Harrisburg Hospital on the night of the accident, after a 3-month maternity leave. "My husband didn't want me to go," Camasi said, but she told him "If we don't blow up we'll need the money."

Nevertheless, Camasi packed clothes, savings bonds, birth certificates, and baby pictures, and left the bags ready by the front door, just in case, and on Sunday the family went to stay with relatives in Erie.

Workers in campus offices said they were told not to leave the buildings. "It seemed like an eternity," said Sandi, in Business Services. She said she received word that her children were being dismissed from school and being taken to a designated area for pickup, but when she was finally sent home from

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Walgren: citizens can guide gov't hi-tech policies

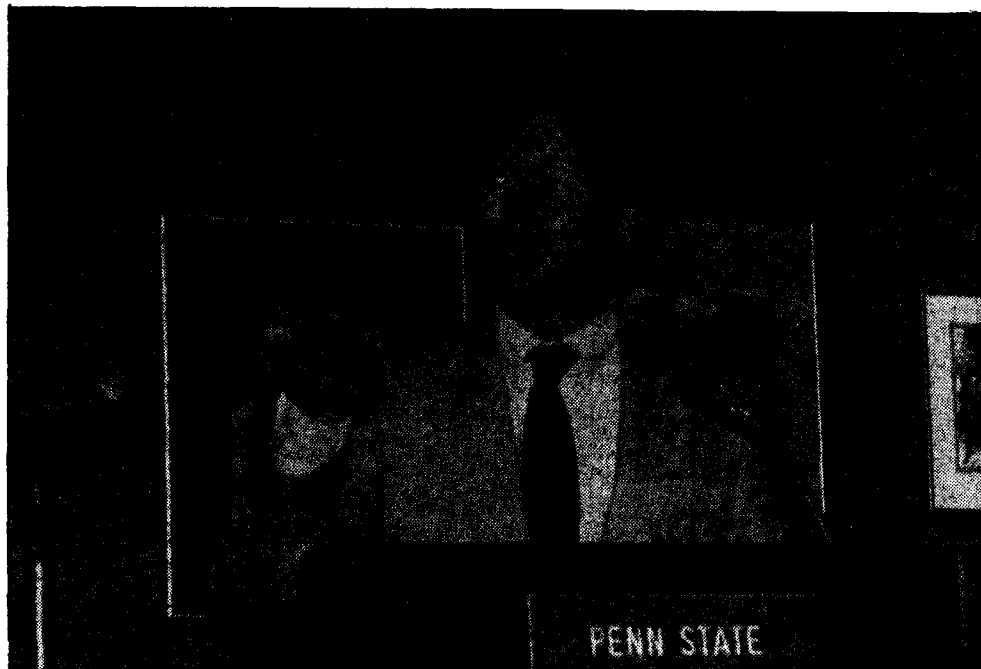
By John Yagecic

A congressman spoke in the Gallery lounge on March 27 as part of the GTE Lectureship program on ethics in technology.

Congressman Doug Walgren, a member of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Technology said "the government's responsibility to do the right thing is really the responsibility of the individual to guide the government.

"The political system we have allows citizens to have extraordinary individual influence," Walgren said.

During the lecture, Walgren also spoke of the neutrality of technology.



Congressman Doug Walgren

photo by John Yagecic

"Just as technology can create danger, it can create a way around the danger," Walgren said.

"Science is like a genie that will get out of the bottle regardless of who pulls the cork," said Walgren.

Walgren referred to the development of the atomic bomb as a demonstration of two conflicting factions striving to perfect the same technology.

"That knowledge, like any neutral entity, was not just amenable to the Einsteins and the Oppenheims," Walgren said.

"Had they not developed it, the bomb would have been developed regardless," said Walgren.

Walgren blamed the federal deficit for the lack of funds for research and education in the science and technology fields.