

ORGANIC LIVING

By

Robert Rodale

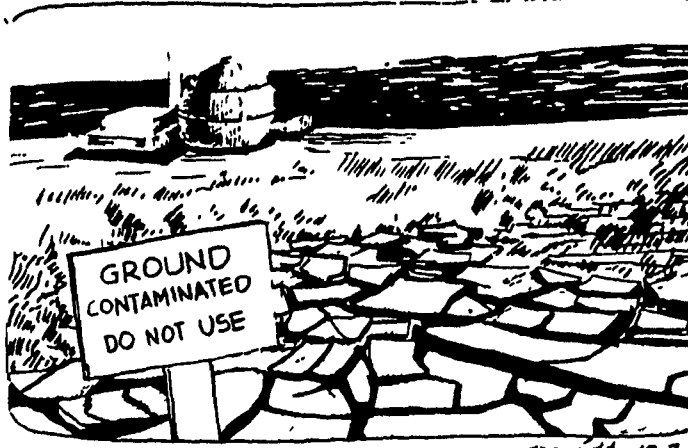
THE ATOM WON'T SOLVE OUR ENERGY WOES

It is getting harder and harder to find anyone willing to endorse nuclear power plants as the energy source of the future except, of course, those who profit from such white elephants. And an increasing number of people are having serious doubts about the atomic plants already operating around the country.

The anti-nuclear power forces are growing, and the evidence behind them is becoming increasingly solid. Much of it is being supplied by the nuclear power plants themselves in minor accidents and near-disasters that utility spokesmen have glibly assured the public could never happen.

Consider just a few of those incidents: In June, a pipe carrying radioactive material at the Cordova, Illinois nuclear power plant ruptured, triggering an automatic fire protection system. Some of the water that was sprayed through the plant leaked into the Mississippi River. Said a utility spokesman: "The water in the Mississippi River has a low level of radioactivity, but is not considered hazardous by the Atomic Energy Commission. If someone drank the water, it wouldn't hurt them, aside from the dirt."

In March, an accident at the Hanford Nuclear Power Reservation in Washington sent 2,500 gallons of highly radioactive liquid leaking into the ground. Residents were



told not to worry, since "the ground will absorb the wastes before they can reach the water supply." The previous year 115,000 gallons of radioactive wastes spilled at the Hanford Station — the worst on record in the United States.

In another incident, construction on a nuclear power plant in Virginia was halted after environmentalists pointed out it was being built on a geological fault — a prime earthquake site. But the AEC said that manpower restrictions had hindered its effort to do extensive research on the site before construction began.

Most disturbing, one might guess, is what the public is not being told. News of an accident at the San Onofre Nuclear Power Plant in California was withheld by both the Southern California Edison Company, which operates the facility, and the Atomic Energy Commission — until it was revealed by the press. Through a series of mistakes, the emergency core cooling system and the plant sustained considerable damage, putting it out of service until at least early next year. The AEC excused its action in withholding the information by saying that the accident was not serious and posed no hazard to the public.

In fact, according to a study done by the Nader organization, approximately 850 abnormal occurrences were reported to the AEC between January 1972 and May 1973 by the nation's 30 operating nuclear power plants.

Abnormal incidents such as leaks of radioactive material seem to be occurring at a much greater rate than anyone would like to admit.

And what is the attitude of industry toward the leaks? Apparently some of those whose job is to voice industry opinion think the whole thing is pretty funny.

In its May 1974 issue, "Industrial Research" magazine

awarded the AEC its "Butterfingers-of-the-Month" award for the leak of 2,500 gallons of radioactive waste from a tank at Richland, Washington.

Then there was another 2,000 gallon leak at Richland, followed by the announcement that plutonium from a weapons laboratory in Ohio was found in the mud of a canal near Miamisburg, Ohio.

It won't be funny, though, if radioactive wastes seep into drinking water and people in huge areas of the country suddenly find themselves sitting on top of a radioactive pool of water that they're expected to drink.

Newspapers recently were filled with the news that the French had resumed atmospheric testing of nuclear bombs. Official reaction was grim and many were quick to condemn the French for spreading nuclear pollution.

But when it comes to nuclear plant pollution here at home, the critics are strangely silent.

The only way out of this dilemma is to stop building the plants until there is a fail-safe method of insuring full safety, something that is not likely now or ever. A concentrated effort must be made to find alternate sources of power that are non-polluting, something nuclear power is not and will never be.

The demand for electricity reportedly declined last winter for the first time since the Depression, a trend some experts see continuing. This lull in demand makes now the ideal time to search for alternate sources of power before it is too late.

(Editor's Note: The opinions appearing in "Organic Living" are those of its author, Robert Rodale, an independent columnist. Rodale's comments do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the Lancaster Farming editor or anyone else on the Lancaster Farming staff.)

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