

Denenberg hits reactors

By STEVE IVEY
Collegian Managing Editor

Five million people may die and billions of dollars of property may be destroyed if an accident occurs at a nuclear powerplant, according to Herbert S. Denenberg, state Insurance Commissioner.

Because of this "risk and uncertainty about nuclear reactors, they probably shouldn't be built at all," Denenberg told The Daily Collegian.

Colleges having reactors should shut them down too, Denenberg said, adding "College reactors are not really watched as closely as they should be and safety precautions aren't as good as in the bigger reactors."

He said because insurance companies only will cover college reactors for \$250,000 while they give \$95 million coverage to utility's reactors, college reactors are risky and should be shut down.

Denenberg held two days of public hearings last month about the nuclear powerplants, and heard such witnesses as Ralph Nader, Massachusetts Institute of Technology physics professor, Henry Kendall, the Atomic Energy Commission, the Pennsylvania Electric Association, and the Atomic Industrial Forum.

"Our conclusion," Denenberg said, "was that the public does not have adequate insurance protection nor does it have adequate legal protection" in the event of a nuclear accident.

He said he also believes utility

companies will never be able to provide adequate protection because the insurance companies refuse to insure them for more than \$95 million.

An accident at a reactor would probably cost billions of dollars, Denenberg said, adding that in such a case, "the public would just be out of luck."

Denenberg said the best index of a firm's safety is the amount of insurance it carries. "If the insurance companies won't insure something, it means that they don't have confidence in its safety."

He said the nuclear reactor's insurance is small when compared to the half-billion dollars worth of insurance some airlines carry. "It may be that utilities do not deserve any more insurance because they are so hazardous," he added.

"We feel that the AEC and the nuclear establishment have covered up this issue," Denenberg said. "You've got the nuclear establishment saying that they can run a perfect technology forever without a major catastrophe. But in every other technology we've ever had — airlines, space — there have been disasters."

Denenberg added, "Those same guys who are telling us that they can run a perfect technology and never have accidents, are the same guys building toasters, and they can't even make their damn toasters work."

There now are 35 nuclear powerplants operating while 57 are under construction and an additional 81 are being planned.

Denenberg said, "Now we are only talking about 35 in the whole United States. But by the year 2000, there will be 1,000 of them and then we have the problems of transporting their radioactive material and storing the nuclear wastes."

"I would rather take an atomic bomb than a nuclear power-plant," he said. "At least when an atomic bomb goes off you know something's happened. With radiation you never know."

According to Denenberg, "even the friends of the Atomic Energy Commission say that it has not treated the public honestly; they've held back information and failed to disclose more. It's a bad outfit and it's behaved as an adjunct to the nuclear establishment."

Denenberg said his goal is to stop new construction on reactors and close down presently operating ones.

"Even if insurance can be produced, I don't think these plants should operate because of the real loss of lives that might come about if there was an accident."

"We shouldn't run the risk of killing five million people just for some electricity," he added.

Denenberg said that during the August hearings, "we put out 'A Shopper's Guide to Non-Nuclear Insurance.' The point is that you don't have insurance on nuclear powerplants, and there is no way you can get insurance. The only person who can write insurance on this would be God, and He isn't."

"We shouldn't run the risk of killing five million people just for some electricity!"

—Denenberg



Photo by Steve Ivey

Nuclear reactor director defends facility against accident charges

By MICHAEL SOLLY
Collegian Staff Writer

"A strong radiation release from this reactor cannot happen. You are postulating that everything would fail at once, and in this case that is almost completely impossible."

Dr. Samuel Levine, director of the Breazeale Nuclear Reactor facility, was defending the reactor's safety procedures against questions of radiation accidents raised by Pennsylvania Insurance Commissioner Herbert Denenberg.

Denenberg told The Daily Collegian in August he felt the \$560 million insurance ceiling on both nuclear research and larger nuclear power reactors was not enough to cover a major radiation release in a populated area. Expressing concern over possible accidents, Denenberg said only a few dollars for every \$100 damage would be reimbursed to victims of reactor failures.

Levine said Denenberg never contacted anyone in the reactor program in the issue, and he had never been to the facility or reviewed its operations.

"Scare tactics are common with nuclear systems because of the public's natural fear of unfamiliar things," Levine said. "But the public doesn't realize the priority given safety considerations in the construction of any reactor anywhere. They've been operating safely on land and in submarines since 1955."

"When I first went into the nuclear business I was very surprised at the safety attitudes," he said. "We set up and analyzed plans for even the most unthinkable disasters."

Levine said those experiences led him to believe chances of a major radiation leak from nuclear reactors was extremely small. "It would be more realistic to worry about a jetliner crashing into Beaver Stadium during a football game," he noted.

in the event of malfunctions.

The chances of a reactor plant being damaged in that manner are much greater than a large-scale radiation release, he said. "But the utilities can't afford to have even that happen. Reactor cores cost about \$20 to \$30 million each. You can imagine how concerned they are about safety," Levine said.

Levine also was critical of published reports by University of Pittsburgh radiologist Ernest Sternglass that allegedly related an increase in the State College infant mortality rate to increases in radiation leakage from the reactor.

"The radiation releases nowhere approach dangerous levels," Levine said. Sternglass used 1962 as his base year, when the area infant mortality rate was at its lowest recorded level. "It had nowhere to go but up," Levine said.

"He just graphed the mortality rates and leakage rates and pulled out the parts that happened to coincide," Levine added. "We did the same thing. We found the mortality rate closely coincides to the increase in attendance of the Navy football games over those years. Maybe the loud mobs who attend those games have something to do with it."

Asked about the concern over waste disposal, Levine said new technology has been developed to ensure safe disposal of waste products in solid form, and he said he anticipated a monitored storage facility where all the nation's radioactive waste could be stored on a 10-acre site.

The \$2 million Breazeale reactor, completed in 1955, consists of 100 rods of enriched Uranium fuel immersed 24 feet below the surface of a 71,000 gallon pool. Water constantly is circulated to remove the heat created by nuclear fission.

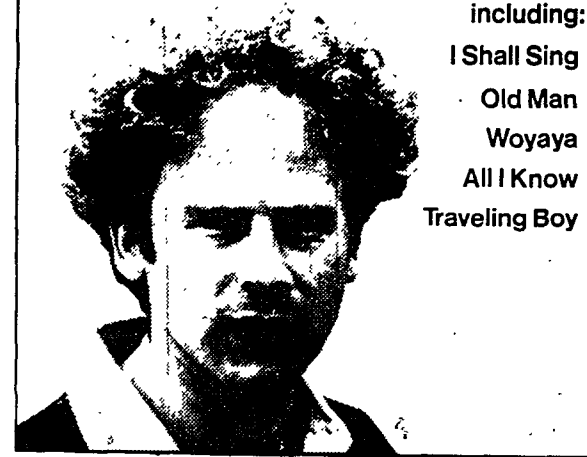
Research programs in nuclear medicine now are being conducted at Breazeale under state and federal contracts.

"It is possible to imagine severe damage to a reactor plant by some sort of structural breakdown or a failure in the control systems," Levine said, "but there would be little damage done to the surrounding areas." He added there were alarms and backup control systems to ensure against destructive simultaneous failures by shutting down operations

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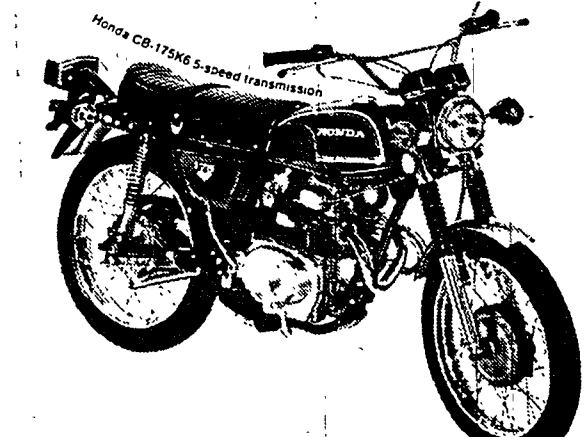
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