

International Indigenous Peoples' Day – Fukushima to West Valley report

International Indigenous Peoples' Day 2011 was celebrated by over 100 people in Buffalo, NY at an event cosponsored by several organizations including Indigenous Women's Initiatives (IWI) and Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS). The memories of nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki 66 years ago were commemorated in conjunction with the ongoing Fukushima nuclear power disaster. Agnes Williams (IWI) told the story of the Peacemaker bringing The Great Law to Jigonsaseh. Diane D'Arrigo (NIRS) reported on the West Valley nuclear site as part of the whole nuclear fuel chain that impacts indigenous people around the world. Some of her points:

Removing **Uranium** from the ground is begins the nuclear fuel **chain**—not a cycle—because all the radioactivity cannot be reused—in fact it spreads into the air, water, people, animals, plants and microorganisms throughout the food web of life. A **Walk Away From Uranium** is starting this year in **Australia**, one of the places where uranium is most concentrated, on aboriginal lands. North America is threatened with both traditional uranium mining and a newer method—injecting hazardous chemicals into the ground to dissolve the uranium from the rock, extracting the uranium and leaving the chemicals to pollute the ground water. A big gathering in Saskatchewan this fall is organizing to stop uranium mining. The **Navajo Nation** passed a resolution against more uranium mining and continues to suffer from mining and milling since the 1960s. **Some of that uranium then became the waste at West Valley.**

Uranium -235 atoms can have 'self-sustained chain reactions.' They split, release the energy that held them together, and break into other radioactive atoms (waste) and neutrons. The neutrons bang into other uranium-235 atoms which split, release heat and form more radioactive atoms --the "nuclear waste" that lasts from a few seconds to hundreds of millions of years. **Radioactive iodine and cesium from Fukushima nuclear power reactors are being detected in milk, rainwater and vegetables in North America and Europe.** They formed from splitting uranium-235 atoms. When the reactors went out of control, radioactivity escaped and is still blowing around the northern hemisphere falling onto ocean and land depending on the weather inevitably getting into whales, fish, plants, and animals including humans. Hundreds of other radioactive elements escaped but are not being monitored. In fact, **the US government (EPA) stopped special monitoring even though the disaster continues** and radiation still pours from Fukushima.

The 3 nuclear power reactors at Fukushima Daiichi, Japan that were operating at the time of the earthquake exploded and melted down beginning on March 11, 2011 and are still out of control months later, releasing dangerous radioactivity into the air, soil, ground water, oceans and communities locally and around the globe, certainly the northern hemisphere. Some of the 7 irradiated nuclear waste storage pools that had been storing waste from 6 nuclear reactors appear to have lost much of the enormous amounts of stored radioactivity to the environment. The evacuation zone is now a dead zone

to which no one can return. The radioactive contamination levels outside the evacuation zone are so high that the Japanese government has raised the allowable exposure levels to 20 TIMES HIGHER so that it is legal for people to stay and get routine high doses. This means that children, who are more susceptible to radiation than adults, may be exposed to adult worker doses. A radiation-detector manufacturer visited an area outside the evacuation zone in Japan and found kids' lunch tables and school yards contaminated over 2000 times normal background levels. Some Japanese food such as fish, beef, vegetables and milk is radioactive.

Green Action, one of the most active public interest groups in Japan, is asking all world citizens to sign a petition to the Japanese government to protect the children of Fukushima and Japan. These were at the event can be signed on line at <http://fukushima.greenaction-japan.com/>

At **West Valley** we have radioactive waste from nuclear weapons and power reactors from the 1960s and 1970s. High level radioactive wastes were brought to West Valley to "reprocess" and bury and other radioactive wastes were brought to bury in unlined soil trenches. A profit-making company (Nuclear Fuel Services) with state and federal licenses reprocessed and buried nuclear waste from the early 1960s until the 1970s, then closed down and left the waste-laden site in the early 1980s. New York State has much of the financial liability and all of us living downstream – the Seneca Nation of Indians, Western and Northern NYS residents, First Nations and Canadians-- are left with this long-lasting deadly legacy—in rapidly eroding soil. In 1980 a US federal law, the *West Valley Demonstration Project Act*, called on the US Department of Energy (DOE) to 'clean up' the reprocessing part of the site. DOE solidified some of the liquid tank waste into intensely radioactive logs 10 feet tall and emitting lethal levels of radioactivity that must be handled by remote-control with heavy shielding. They are stored in the building which is now slated to be demolished. The plan is for them to sit on a pad outside in 50-year casks.

New York must 'manage' the 14 trenches of radioactive waste including plutonium that it had permitted to be buried.

Some waste has been sent to federal repositories, but enormous amounts of radioactivity are still buried posing a threat to the water now and for thousands of years to come. New York and DOE plan to demolish the buildings but have delayed, perhaps forever, removing the buried waste, even though it is expected, by most experts, to leak into the ground and water. Some is already leaking and engineers are trying to intercept and filter out some of the radioactivity before it gets to the creeks and our drinking water faucets. We can pray this works on this one plume but we don't know how many others there are or will be. Indigenous Women's Initiative, Nuclear Information and Resource Service and Citizens' Environmental Coalition are contracting with an independent hydrogeologist to help assess the monitoring that is going on and propose protective monitoring for those of us downstream in years to come. That independent report will be out in 2012. In the meantime, we must stay alert to the activities and studies going on at West Valley if we hope to protect ourselves and our piece of the planet and have a say in the final condition of the West Valley nuclear waste site.

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