

EPA Dramatically Weakens Radiation Protection

For Immediate Release

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April 15, 2013 The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is publishing in the Federal Register today controversial new Protective Action Guides (PAGs) for responding to radioactive releases. EPA says it solicits public comment but is nonetheless making the PAGs immediately effective.

The new PAGs eliminate requirements to evacuate people in the face of high projected thyroid, skin, or lifetime whole body doses; recommend dumping radioactive waste in municipal garbage dumps not designed for such waste; propose five options for drinking water, which would dramatically increase the permitted concentrations of radioactivity in drinking water, by as much as 27,000 times, compared to EPA's current Safe Drinking Water Act limits; and suggest markedly relaxing long-term cleanup standards.

"In essence the government is now saying nuclear power accidents could produce such widespread contamination and produce such high radiation levels that the government should abandon efforts to clean it up and instead force people to live with radiation-induced cancer risks orders of magnitude higher than ever considered acceptable," said Daniel Hirsch, president of Committee to Bridge the Gap.

The PAGs are intended to guide the response to nuclear power reactor accidents (like Fukushima in Japan, Chernobyl in Ukraine and Three Mile Island in the U.S.), "dirty bomb" explosions, radioactive releases from nuclear fuel and weapons facilities, and nuclear transportation accidents.

"EPA ignores the fact that women and kids are at even greater risk from radiation. The doses permitted by the 2013 EPA PAGs will allow indecent exposures to radiation," says Diane D'Arrigo of Nuclear Information and Resource Service. "Women are 50%

more vulnerable than men and children are at even greater risk from radiation than adults, according to data from the National Academy of Sciences.”

Extremely high food contamination levels would be allowed by the incorporation of Food and Drug Administration 1998 guidance. EPA officials had previously criticized those standards, saying that 1 in 50 people eating food at those levels would get cancer from their exposure, on top of our normal cancer risk.

The PAGs also incorporate and expand controversial Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS) PAGs adopted in 2008 which would allow long-term doses as high as thousands of millirems per year without cleanup being required. Associated guidance for carrying out the long-term cleanup, prepared for DHS and for which the comment period expires today, recommends abandoning EPA’s long-held cleanup standards and instead allowing people to be exposed to doses as high as the equivalent of three chest X rays a day for one’s entire life. Over 70 years, EPA estimates 1 in 6 people would get cancer from exposure that high, orders of magnitude higher risk than EPA has historically said is acceptable.

In addition, EPA admits that a nuclear power accident could far exceed the capacity of radioactive waste sites to manage waste generated from cleanups and therefore suggests allowing the waste to go to regular trash dumps, a fight the public has waged for decades in the US.

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