

Nuclear program in Japan under attack

by EIR Staff

The international anti-nuclear lobby has launched a new drive against Japan's nuclear power program, timed to coincide with the April 8 commissioning of a Japanese coastguard cutter that will escort a freighter carrying plutonium from France to Japan.

A report was released on April 8 by the Maryland-based ECO Engineering, Inc. in Tokyo, New York, and Washington, which claims that the Japanese shipments of plutonium will be unsafe. The company consists of "former U.S. government sea transport experts, who specialize in risk analyses of hazardous cargoes," the news agency Reuters reported. The document was drawn up at the request of the eco-terrorist organization Greenpeace and the Washington-based Nuclear Control Institute (NCI).

Japan currently depends on conventional nuclear power for almost 30% of its energy, making it a leader in world nuclear power. The German government is currently seeking Japan's support for joint action to improve the safety of nuclear power plants in the former Soviet Union.

Japan is aiming for 40% of its electricity to be nuclear this decade, and is starting a huge breeder reactor program this year, for which it plans to begin shipping tons of plutonium from European processing plants this fall. The plan is to ship 30 tons of plutonium in the next three decades.

The plutonium, according to the ECO Engineering report, "poses a serious risk because the containers it will be in may not survive major accidents." The report claims that the containers were not guaranteed to withstand fire, collision, or deep-sea immersion in the worst possible cases. ECO Engineering says that shipboard fires could result in temperatures of more than 3,000°F and burn for days. Most of the voyage from Europe to Japan would be in waters where depths exceed 660 feet. Additional concerns were collision and the impact of possible missile attacks, the company says.

Three Mile Island 'mafia'

The Nuclear Control Institute's president, Paul Leventhal, went to Tokyo to mobilize against the shipments. Whereas the Japanese government says that its containers meet the safety standards set by the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency, Leventhal told a Tokyo press conference on April 8 that the IAEA's standards were far from adequate when dealing with plutonium. "Those standards

were set for transporting spent nuclear fuels, not plutonium. There is no doubt that they should be upgraded," he said.

As *EIR* reported on March 6, Leventhal was the person who directed the U.S. Senate Nuclear Regulatory Committee's "investigation" that shut down Pennsylvania's Three Mile Island nuclear power plant, in a hoax which led to the destruction of the U.S. nuclear industry. "The single greatest danger to the Korean Peninsula is Japan, and the over 100 tons of weapons-capable plutonium it plans to acquire over the next 20 years," he raved to the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian Affairs on Jan. 14.

"This plutonium is enough to make about 120 crude atomic bombs, and is being reprocessed from spent Japanese fuel in Britain and France. . . . If inhaled, one millionth of a gram of plutonium would cause lung cancer," Jinzaburo Takagi, head of Citizens Nuclear Information Center, Japan's Greenpeace, told the Tokyo press conference. "Let's suppose an accident occurred in Tokyo Bay involving the ship. Even if about 1% of the cargo was exposed to the air, the government would have to evacuate 10 million people," the former nuclear scientist said.

Classified information demanded

Japanese Greenpeace and its U.S. handlers at the NCI are demanding that the Japanese government reveal sensitive information regarding planned routes and vessel standards for the ship.

"While we understand Japan's security concerns of not disclosing voyage details, there is no reason why it could not reveal information on the safety standards," Leventhal said. Greenpeace and NCI have already threatened to take "direct action" to physically attack the Japanese ship convoy, if the United States does not intervene to stop the shipments.

An official of the Japanese government's Science and Technology Agency said that the government has in some cases tested the containers that will hold the plutonium beyond the IAEA standards. "But," he said, "we cannot reveal every detail about the plutonium containers because that would be a security risk." Japan plans to ship the fuel from France on a freighter, the 7,000-ton *Pacific Crane*, escorted by a lightly armed coastguard cutter, the 7,500-ton *Shikishima*.

The *Shikishima* was handed over to the Maritime Safety Agency, Japan's coast guard, in a tightly guarded ceremony in Tokyo Bay. The vessel's armament, a 35 mm cannon and two 20 mm machineguns, were covered. The coast guard has refused to reveal details about the voyage, but it is expected to take place in October or November.

ECO Engineering and Greenpeace, however, are already publicizing the three possible routes: through the Panama Canal or around Africa or the tip of South America. In any of the three, the ship would have to pass near dozens of countries and major sea lanes, they complain, where "accidents" are a danger.