By Mary Lampert
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OF NUCLEAR INTEREST: Pilgrim's Cancers – 'Tobacco Science' versus fact

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Pilgrim's spin doctors choose to rely on fiction, not facts. We rely on the National Academies (our nation's premier scientists). The National Academies' latest report said there is no safe dose of radiation and that exposure to even very low levels of radiation is three times more dangerous than previously expected – and more so for children and women. We rely also on statistics from the Massachusetts Cancer Registry. In 1982 it began recording data showing a continued increase in radiation-linked cancers in communities around Pilgrim.

A review of Massachusetts Cancer Registry data shows that Plymouth (from 2002-2009) has a statistically significant increased level of leukemia, at a 95 percent probability level. This means that there is, at most, a 5 percent chance that the difference between the observed and expected cases of leukemia is due to chance. There also is a statistically significant increased level of prostate cancer, another radiation-linked disease.

For the previous two decades, the Massachusetts Cancer Registry shows the "footprints" of radiation-linked disease (leukemia, thyroid cancer, multiple myeloma and prostate cancer) in the seven towns most likely to be impacted by Pilgrim – Carver, Duxbury, Kingston, Marshfield, Pembroke, Plymouth and Plympton. The Cape is downwind from Pilgrim much of the year. It, along with Southeastern Massachusetts, has the highest cancer rates in the state. There has not yet been a study to determine whether radiation emissions from Pilgrim are the missing variable to explain the high cancer rates there.

A major case-control study by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) in 1999 found a four-fold increase in adult leukemia the closer one lived to or if one worked at Pilgrim. Pilgrim did not like the results and cut a political deal allowing it to appoint a second peer review panel to re-review the study and write a report. Even Pilgrim's handpicked panel concluded that, "The original study team adhered to generally accepted epidemiological principles... [And] ...the findings of the study cannot be readily dismissed on the basis of methodological errors or proven biases... [and last]...the association found between leukemia and proximity to the Pilgrim nuclear facility was unexpectedly strong."

Pilgrim apologists say radiation from Pilgrim is closely monitored and controlled. Not so. Pilgrim collects its own environmental samples, fewer now than previous years; analyzes the samples in their own lab; and writes its own reports – the equivalent of letting students write and grade their own exams. MDPH has a very limited offsite monitoring program due to lack of finances. Since 2007, there have been onsite monitoring wells to detect radioactive tritium leaks before they enter Cape Cod Bay. Leaks of tritium are evident but not the source. If more wells were installed, would more releases be detected?

In 1999, MDPH recommended that Pilgrim place real-time air monitors in off-site communities. Pilgrim refused to do so. MDPH began its own, very limited offsite air-monitoring program in 2010.

Pilgrim's operational history affects us today. Pilgrim began operations with bad fuel and without filtration. In 1982, Pilgrim blew its toxic filters, spewing hot particles into neighborhoods. A state-sponsored study showed that weather conditions then were worst-case for holding contamination over local communities and Cape Cod. Environmental samples showed Cesium-137 in milk samples from a close-by farm was 1 million times greater than expected; no Cesium-137 was found in control samples. A similar pattern was recorded by Pilgrim in other environmental samples. Pilgrim claimed it was due, not to it, but to Chinese test bombs. You decide. Did the Chinese have "smart" test bombs that targeted Pilgrim's indicator samples but not their control samples?

Spin doctors cannot raise the dead or make the sick well. If the dead and sick with radiation-linked diseases are significantly more prevalent near Pilgrim than in communities distant, the conclusion seems obvious.

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