In recent years, the DOE was forced to shut down several plutonium and tritium production facilities that simply wore out and became too dangerous to operate. With these shutdowns came a flood of astonishing revelations about how these facilities had been operated for the last four decades:

- radionuclides and other harmful substances were intentionally released into the air, water and soil -- without public notice;
- plants were run without adequate worker protection or safety precautions;
- toxic and radioactive waste accumulated in thousands of dump sites, unmonitored for years;
- hazardous materials were transported through major American cities.

Unanswered Questions

How much radioactive and hazardous material got into the environment? How many workers and local residents were contaminated? How much will it cost to clean up this mess? *We don't really know how serious the problems are.*

Secrecy and willful neglect have left us with little or no independent analysis of exposure levels and possible effects, and no government agency has a comprehensive plan for dealing with the problem. Without more facts about the damage already caused and the continued risks, no one can make informed choices about cleaning up the plants or restarting them.

There are preliminary estimates that the cost of cleaning up at least 80 existing contaminated DOE sites could be $200 billion and might take 30 years. The U.S. General Accounting Office estimates that more than half these sites may be "irretrievably contaminated." Too expensive to clean up completely, after decontamination they would still have to be monitored for decades. But many of the sites remain unsurveyed, much of the data about releases remains secret, and the DOE remains reluctant to permit independent oversight of its activities.

In addition, DOE sites are not currently held to the same environmental and safety standards as commercial nuclear reactors and similar public facilities. DOE's nuclear weapons activities are not subject to public comment and independent review, and public legal actions are severely limited. Applying current public standards to DOE waste management, disposal, construction and operation and permitting citizen enforcement through legal action would severely affect current cost estimates for cleanup.

Ominously, many government officials continue to emphasize production of more nuclear weapons over safety and cleanup. The DOE's 20-year plan projects spending only $32 billion on cleanup, but an additional $52 billion for constructing new production reactors and repairing old facilities. The plans do not consider whether a U.S.-Soviet strategic weapons reduction agreement might make new facilities unnecessary.

By challenging the Soviet Union to a mutual moratorium on production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons, the U.S. could advance long-term arms control goals and increase world security. Such agreements would also allow us to reduce the size of the DOE nuclear weapons production complex, would free up funds for cleanup and would eliminate the high cost of bringing decrepit facilities into compliance with existing environmental and health regulations. In the long run, this would be the most effective way to reduce the risks faced by a number of citizens who live and work near the government's nuclear weapons complex.

References available from PSR upon request.

PSR's Campaign for Informed Consent

In October 1988, Physicians for Social Responsibility called for a *comprehensive and independent* evaluation of health and safety problems in the DOE's nuclear weapons production complex. PSR urged that no reactors or other facilities currently closed be restarted until that study is completed. This work is in the PSR tradition of informing the public about the nuclear arms race and assuring that our own government does not put us at risk without our consent.

Concerned citizens can make a difference on this issue. In at least four communities near DOE facilities, coalitions of citizen groups have filed lawsuits against the government, have demanded environmental and health studies of the effects of plant operations on their community, and have insisted on government accountability. Their actions have succeeded in keeping unsafe plants shut, in funding health studies at the Hanford Reservation in Washington State, and in expanding citizen access at public hearings.

The debate over what to do about bomb factories in our backyards will take many years. At stake are hundreds of billions of dollars which can be used to clean up sites, repair environmental damage and protect citizens, or to build the assembly lines for the next round of the nuclear arms race. PSR is working to educate the public and policy-makers about this choice, and to ensure that the public health is not sacrificed to the pursuit of needless additional nuclear weapons.

National security cannot be achieved merely through military spending and a constant race to build new and more powerful nuclear weapons systems. Security also comes from the strength of our economy and the investments we make in health care, education, the environment and other social priorities. We have undermined our security by neglecting these priorities in pursuit of missiles, bombers and Star Wars weapons in space.

Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) is an organization of doctors and concerned citizens committed to preventing nuclear war and helping the American public redefine its national security priorities. We believe the arms race threatens our health and security by increasing the risks of nuclear war, by consuming scarce resources, and by harming our global environment.

This brochure is one in a series on national security issues published by PSR. For more information about PSR's campaign to redefine national security, or to become a PSR member, write to 1000 16th St., NW, Suite 810, Washington, DC 20036; or call (202) 785-3777.

PSR has convened a Physicians Task Force on DOE Nuclear Weapons Facilities to:

- assemble and evaluate existing health data,
- push for disclosure of now-secret information to help determine the environmental and health effects of these plants
- advocate an end to DOE "self-regulation" through independent oversight of all environmental, health and occupational safety activities at the plants.