Nuclear Hotseat #797 - October 6, 2025

BREAKING: Melissa Bumstead, Boeing/Santa Susana Field Lab Clean-Up Lies + IDAHO! It's NOT a “Nuclear Lifestyle Innovation Campus” - it's a RADIOACTIVE WASTE DUMP!

Libbe HaLevy: [00:00:00] Nuclear linguistic hocus-pocus. When the Department of Energy and your state representatives start calling their proposal for a nuclear waste dump a campus, you need to realize that it's not about some cute little radiation-spewing cartoon atom rushing across the quad to get to its next class. It's intentional linguistic misdirection, a cover-up reinforced every time you state it or write it that make you think that bad is good, black is white, and what they're proposing about nuclear waste is safe.

They only grin at you and chuck you under the chin when they want you to do something for them that they would never allow in their own neighborhoods So when the slickly persuasive, grinning nuclear flimflam artists try to sell the good people of Idaho the Brooklyn Bridge, uh, uh, land in Florida, uh, fish from [00:01:00] Fukushima...

Uh, no. The purported benefits of a, quote, "Nuclear Lifestyle Innovation Campus," end quote, in their own backyards, it takes a genuine expert, a fourth-generation Idahoan committed to preserving the water, the land, and the people of her state, to explain the truth to concerned local citizens. And when she tells you-

Leigh Ford: There was one question is, what is your primary concern with nuclear energy?

And waste was the main concern that people had. And I don't know if it's the representatives in the state who are not being transparent about the Nuclear Lifecycle Campus being primarily for waste storage and waste processing, or if it's Department of Energy. But Department of Energy is where I found the information that, A, states will have to take out-of-state waste, and there's 100,000 metric tons of it sitting at reactor sites mostly back east.

And [00:02:00] B, that states needed to figure out a way to pay for it, basically that they didn't want states to rely on Department of Energy and they wanted to

protect federal taxpayers. So those are the two main messages that aren't being translated from Department of Energy to the state, or from the state to the people.

But we're not getting the whole story, and that is what we deserve. We're not stupid. We're not backwards. We don't hate innovation. We just want the truth.

Libbe HaLevy: And you deserve it. Well, when Leigh Ford, executive director of Idaho's nuclear watchdog, the Snake River Alliance, cuts through the slick government and nuclear industry wording and reveals the uncomfortable truth that Department of Energy and others are trying to sell to the people of Idaho, you see yet another outpost of that awful, deadly, dangerous seat that we all share.

Nuclear Hotseat theme: [00:03:00] Nuclear Hotseat. What are those people thinking? Nuclear Hotseat. What have those boys been drinking? Nuclear Hotseat. The corium is sinking. Our time to act is shrinking, but our activists are linking.

Nuclear Hotseat. It's da bomb

Libbe HaLevy: Welcome to Nuclear Hotseat, the weekly international news magazine keeping you up to date on all things nuclear from a different perspective. We're a show for people who know nothing about nuclear who want to know something, and people who know something about nuclear who would like to know just a little bit more.

My name is Libbe HaLevy. I'm the producer and host, as well as a survivor of the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island from just one mile away, [00:04:00] so I know what can happen when those nuclear so-called experts get it wrong. This week we talk with Leigh Ford, executive director of Idaho's nuclear watchdog, the Snake River Alliance, and the group's community outreach and volunteer coordinator, Heidi Henderson.

While Idaho has not generated a lot of visibility in the national nuclear conversation, we need to be paying attention because it's one of five states currently vying to be the target of a massive nuclear waste dump. And in breaking news, we'll have an interview with Melissa Bumstead of Parents Against the Santa Susana Field Lab.

She will be talking about Boeing's radiologically contaminated site in the foothills north of Los Angeles, and their current manipulations to hide what it is

they are doing and not implement the strongest possible safety standards. It's a [00:05:00] jaw-dropping, hair-raising story, and it's playing out right now.

We will also have nuclear news from around the world and lots more honest and verifiable nuclear information, all of it coming up over the next few moments. Today is Tuesday, October 6th, 2026, and here is this week's nuclear news from a different perspective.

This is a breaking story that I'm actually recording on Wednesday, October 7, because late last night I was able to interview Melissa Bumstead. She is founder and co-director of Parents Against the Santa Susana Field Lab in Southern California, and the group has been fighting Santa Susana Field Lab site owner Boeing for a full cleanup of the radiologically contaminated area.

It's located in the foothills above Los Angeles, only 30 miles from downtown This is the [00:06:00] latest in the ongoing battle, and much of it is playing out even as I am recording this. We spoke late on October 6th, 2026. Melissa Bumstead, it's always great having you here, and especially when you're coming direct from an action that you were just taking.

Heidi Henderson: Thank you so much for having us again. We so appreciate your podcast.

Libbe HaLevy: Where were you, and why were you there?

Melissa Bumstead: I was at the gates of the Santa Susana Field Lab. It's one of California's most toxic and radioactive sites, and it's in the hills between Ventura County and Los Angeles, uh, about four miles from where I live.

I was there today because we just found out that the Boeing Company, who owns most of the Santa Susana Field Lab, is about to demolish five buildings used for radioactive experimentation during the Cold War. But I'll tell you what I found out when I was up there. They have already begun, [00:07:00] and they are not using any radiological protections.

Libbe HaLevy: In a situation like this, what kind of protections should be expected and put into place to protect people, the community, the environment?

Melissa Bumstead: We're fortunate that we have a lot of coalition friends with the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability, and so we've been talking to friends in Hanford. We're talking to Tri-Valley CARES, with Livermore Labs, and some

of the things we found that should be done are construction tents with HEPA filters.

I mean, that's so simple, so effective, and yet Boeing doesn't want to pay the money to even do that. They could also have radiological air monitors. We've been told that Boeing might have some air monitors. We have no, no real confirmation if that's happening or not. And then things like making sure that the workers are protected.

I spoke to a worker today. He had no idea that they were working, you know, with potentially a plutonium fuel facility. [00:08:00] Plutonium-239 is one of the most dangerous materials on Earth, has a 24,000-year half-life, a 500,000-year hazardous life, and breathing trace amounts can cause cancer. So the workers on site are being told that these are abandoned warehouses by the Boeing Company because legally, technically, on paper, these buildings aren't radioactive, and that's because in the '80s, Boeing had these buildings tested by Tetra Tech, who has a terrible reputation.

They just reached a $57 million settlement for falsifying radiological sampling. And we talked to Community to Bridge the Gap who, who works up there, and they told us, I believe, don't hold me to this number, but I believe it was 95 detections out of 100 were falsified. This is the same company that did these buildings for Boeing back in the '80s.

They used now outdated equipment, now obsolete rulings and regulations from the 1970s. [00:09:00] And looking at a review of how they did these tests, it may not have been intentional, I, I can't say. It certainly seemed intentional that they were trying to make these buildings look less radioactive. But regardless, the plutonium fuel facility still had 88 detections above background, 88 radioactive detections, and they managed to still say, "Well, that's okay.

It's still good enough," and they were decommissioned. So on paper, they're legally not radioactive. Committee to Bridge the Gap, Physicians for Social Responsibility Los Angeles, and Consumer Watchdog sued Boeing over this 10 years ago. And Boeing, I don't understand how... Well, actually I do, but Boeing won the lawsuit to not only say that these buildings are not radioactive, they came out of this lawsuit with not needing government oversight, hardly any government oversight, no accountability, and they're allowed to take the [00:10:00] debris from these buildings to, they're not taking any of it to low license radioactive waste sites.

In fact, Boeing did a very similar action in 2013 with buildings less dangerous than these, and they brought the material to metal recyclers, concrete and asphalt recyclers, and even to a municipal landfill I mean, it was, it's horrifying, and yet somehow a judge rubber-stamped that as okay, and now they're trying to do it again with a plutonium fuel facility.

Libbe HaLevy: This is horrifying. It's outrageous. It's dangerous. And I know that from my experience of you and the group, Parents Against the Santa Susana Field Lab, that you will be doing something. Do you have a sense at this point as to what your next steps are going to be?

Melissa Bumstead: We only found out about this almost by accident two weeks ago.

So we have been hunting down [00:11:00] all the documentation. We've been trying to make sure we had our facts straight, because obviously if it's not dangerous, we don't wanna cause a big deal about it. But after speaking with experts and deep diving into decades' worth of research, we definitely feel like this is worthy of our concern.

In fact, my co-director and I, Jenny, we're s- we've been so concerned, we have, we have been sick to our stomachs. I mean, our bodies are taking a toll. Uh, because my daughter's a two-time cancer survivor, I know what this does to children's bodies, and if I were to even describe the suffering that my daughter has gone through, everybody would be traumatized.

I mean, none of us would be able to function. That is how hard childhood cancer is, and this is preventable if Boeing would spend the money to either test the buildings again and make sure maybe they're not radioactive, I mean, we know they are, or use the safest methods possible from the demolition all the way to the disposal.

That should be their only two options, and they've somehow found [00:12:00] a third, which is do nothing, don't tell the public, don't listen to any advice from government oversight. So yeah, we're not gonna stand by and let them just hurt our community and give more kids cancer, because we know what's at risk. And so tomorrow we'll be up before dawn.

We found a truck. We found one of the construction trucks, and they park there overnight bec- They have to drive 15 miles up a hill right through communities, right through neighborhoods. I mean, there could not be a worse location for

this site. And so because of, um, restrictions of semi trucks on the road in residential areas, they spend the night there.

Then they load up the truck and they go back down the hill at 6:00 AM, and I found this out by very sneaky methods today.

Libbe HaLevy: For a visual on this, are these trucks that have enclosures over the top? Are there tarps? Are there metal closures? Is this, like, an enclosed space, or is it open to the [00:13:00] environment?

Heidi Henderson: From what I can tell, there is some kind of cover. However, it looks to me like it's meant to catch the wind and not let it be trapped, like aerodynamic. So it's definitely has the potential to let debris and dust out. The other thing is there's no radioactive sign on the vehicle, because technically, legally, you know, these aren't radioactive.

So that's why we're going to take samples after the truck drives by. As soon as it's on public property, on public roads, we are gonna be doing wipes and trying to see if the trucks are tracking any of that radioactive contamination offsite. That would really help us if we found something. I hope to God not to find anything, 'cause obviously I don't want that in my community, but we're gonna look for it.

And then we may follow the trucks for a while, because Boeing refuses to tell us where they're going. They won't tell us the actual final destination for the waste. So we're [00:14:00] thinking we might follow the trucks. I'm not sure. You know, Kettleman City and Buttonwillow are the only two hazardous waste sites in California But that's a six-hour drive.

I don't know that I have six hours tomorrow to follow these trucks to see if they're going there. But you know what makes me sick? Is that we know the people who live in, near those cities, and they are environmental justice communities completely. Very few people speak English. Very few people have access to adequate coverage and medicine and, and what they would need.

And because the landfill there is not made for radioactive waste, it's going to do what radiation does. It, it leaches through it, kind of like burns through, through the debris and ends up in the aquifers, and it ends up in the air. And because it has a 24,000-year half-life, and people are going to be...

Like, generations, generations of people could be harmed. And the communities out in Buttonwillow and Kettleman City, they literally get [00:15:00] all of

California's worst waste. And the thought that now our radioactive waste potentially, I have to say potentially so I don't get sued, is going to their community again.

You know, and how do we stop that? We're not sure yet. We're looking at what will it take. I don't even know if protest will be enough to stop Boeing, because they are dead set. They don't want to admit these are radioactive, because then they would be responsible for all these decades of letting people get exposed to radioactive contamination.

Libbe HaLevy: Melissa, whatever it is that you and the others from your group decide to do, please pick up the phone, send an email, send a text, do semaphores from top of a hill. I don't care what you do, but get in touch with me, because this is a breaking and ongoing story. I happen to live not as close as you do, but I'm not that far away from Santa Susana Field Lab, so that part is personal, and I will do everything I can to help spread the word about what you are doing, what you're going through, and get you [00:16:00] the necessary support through the aegis of Nuclear Hotseat.

Melissa Bumstead: Thank you so much, Libbe, and you can sign our petition, change.org/boeingdemo, and we're trying to get enough signatures to encourage the elected officials out here to take action. And if we get arrested maybe in the next few weeks, if that's what it takes, it might come to that, because when you see something this evil and you have the potential to stop it, even if it costs you and your family, we can't let this happen.

We cannot stand by and watch this happen.

Libbe HaLevy: We will watch you with what you do, and spread the word back. We will also include a link up to your petition on our website, nuclearhotseat.com, under this episode, number 797. And Melissa, safe journey to you tomorrow morning. Would that I could be there, but I'm gonna be in production.

On behalf of all of us, go get 'em. Show us how it's [00:17:00] done. Thanks, Libbe. And hopefully others will take up the flag as well.

Melissa Bumstead: Thank you so much.

Libbe HaLevy: We thought the interview was over, but during our post-interview chitchat, Melissa revealed a truly alarming fact. Here's what happened after she requested real-time air monitoring data from Boeing.

Melissa Bumstead: We're like, "Well, can we at least have Boeing's air monitoring data and not have to wait quarterly? We want it now, real time." So they sent us a PDF of numbers. They didn't bother to interpret it or analyze it for us, just raw numbers. Thankfully, we found Dr. Spott at UC Davis. He ran it through his... He's an air m- air quality scientist, like really, really good one.

He said that Boeing turns off their air monitors at night. He said either what they are doing is they are completely inept at air monitoring, or they are criminally deceptive. So, uh, we're putting up our own air monitors around the SSFL.

Libbe HaLevy: So according to this professor's [00:18:00] interpretation of the data regarding air monitoring, Boeing is either incompetent or criminally negligent.

We will continue to follow this ongoing story, as we have for many years, and keep you up to date. Here's this week's featured interview While Idaho has not generated a lot of visibility in the national nuclear conversation, they and we need to be paying attention because it's one of five states currently vying to be the target of a massive nuclear waste dump.

Though the Department of Energy and the state's pro-nuclear interests are calling it a, quote, "nuclear lifestyle innovation campus." How's that for a focus grouped rebranding obfuscation? This week, to find out what's really going on, we talked with Leigh Ford, executive director of Idaho's nuclear watchdog, the Snake River Alliance, and the group's community outreach and volunteer coordinator, Heidi [00:19:00] Henderson.

Together, they bring us up to date on the pressures being brought to bear on Idaho to become the dump site for massive amounts of the nation's highly radioactive nuclear waste. I spoke with Leigh Ford and Heidi Henderson on October 2nd, 2026. Leigh Ford and Heidi Henderson, thank you so much for joining us today on Nuclear Hotseat.

Leigh Ford: Thank you for having us, Libbe. Yes,

Heidi Henderson: thank you.

Libbe HaLevy: Let's start out first with the Snake River Alliance. What is it?

Leigh Ford: The Snake River Alliance is Idaho's nuclear watchdog. We started after some people found each other in the park in Boise. Three Mile Island had

just melted down, and they were discussing Idaho National Lab, and they discovered that they were using injection wells to dispose of radioactive waste and other nasty things into our aquifer.

And so the Snake River Alliance was born to [00:20:00] help hold them accountable.

Libbe HaLevy: And that's back when Three Mile Island happened, which was 1979. Leigh, you are now the executive director of the Snake River Alliance. What is your background, and what was the path to you coming to this position?

Leigh Ford: I was born and raised in Idaho.

Both my grandfathers worked at Idaho National Lab, but I never really knew anything about it. And I'm also the granddaughter of a Downwinder, but I didn't even realize that until this year. But my father moved us to Boise when he took a position at Idaho Conservation League, and he really installed in me this strong ethic to take care of our water and our land.

And my mom was actually a volunteer for the Snake River Alliance back in the day. She was more of the nuclear weapons abolitionist. So those roots were in me. But I actually went to college, majored in psychology and German, and I, after I finished, my goal was more pre-med. I wanted to be a physician assistant, but I started working at the [00:21:00] Snake River Alliance just part-time, and the nuclear bug hit, ki- just bit me.

I had no idea what was over our sole source aquifer, and it scared me, and I've been here ever since. I guess that was in 2014, I think I started, and I just sort of moved my way up, and, um, just consumed with this. I wanna protect our water for my kids and everybody's kids.

Libbe HaLevy: Heidi, what is your position at the Snake River Alliance, and what has it taken for you to get to it?

Heidi Henderson: I am the community outreach and volunteer coordinator. I joined not too long ago as a part-time employee, but I have been familiar with nuclear contamination and nuclear fallout issues that Idaho has had with this because of my mother's [00:22:00] advocacy She started working as an Idaho Downwinder board member when I was only six years old.

And so from the time I was just a little tyke, she was constantly taking me to protests and hearings and things where I got to see the impact that the Nevada

test site fallout had on my community. I went to college to become a biologist. I got my degree in biology with a minor in environmental studies.

Love being outside, so it just kinda fell right into place. And after losing my job and coming back to Idaho from Missouri, I met Lee and started working for Snake River Alliance, and helping my mom out [00:23:00] with Downwinders projects, and getting her out and about throughout all of Idaho to help Idahoans fill out their Radiation Exposure Compensation Act applications.

Libbe HaLevy: So she's still active.

Heidi Henderson: She is very much active.

Libbe HaLevy: What a wonderful family legacy to have. Now, when someone says nuclear here in the United States, the state of Idaho is not high on the list of recognition and what pops to mind. But the state actually has quite a nuclear past. Lee, what is Idaho's radioactive history, and what are the major issues that the group faces?

Leigh Ford: Idaho has a long radioactive history. The Idaho National Lab was started, I think, in 1949. It was a gunnery range. You know, they said it was isolated and considered wasteland, so they could test nuclear reactors and stuff out there. And [00:24:00] so their mission was basically to test reactors and to push them to their extreme and get them ready for use elsewhere.

So they've had over 50 reactors out there. The mission changed a little bit from time to time. We still take the nuclear Navy's waste and for reprocessing, and then we started getting the nuclear waste from the weapons complex, and we got all the plutonium-contaminated waste from Rocky Flats in Colorado during operation, but after it was shut down by the FBI.

And now, you know, with the new nuclear renaissance, we are obviously at the forefront testing new reactors, and now there are five states that are faced with what the Department of Energy is calling a li- a nuclear life cycle innovation campus, and Idaho raised its hand to be a host for that. And what it would entail is reactors [00:25:00] and reprocessing and enrichment, but primarily it is waste storage and taking nuclear waste from reactor sites around the country for management, storage, reprocessing, and such.

So yes, we have a long, and a lot of people here say often proud, history in the nuclear industry. Sorry.

Libbe HaLevy: They're proud of this history?

Leigh Ford: A lot of people in Eastern Idaho are very proud of it. Kind of reminds me of the mentality when our government was testing nuclear weapons in Nevada, and they really drummed up the patriotism of it all, and people would go out and watch it and, and things like that.

I almost feel like it's the same kind of thing. It's something to be proud of, and you're part of making America great. I don't know.

Heidi Henderson: Part of our radioactive history came from the Nevada test site, came from nuclear testing done in the '50s and '60s. [00:26:00] From 1951 to 1962, there were 100 above-ground tests that were conducted.

They waited for the wind to blow north, and there's record of the Atomic Energy Commission saying that we were the low-use segment of the population.

Libbe HaLevy: They love that phrase. That's what Leslie Groves used in the Manhattan Project before the first atomic bomb test, the Trinity test, saying that there was nobody in the area, but if there was anybody, they were a low-use segment of the population.

They used that against you as well?

Heidi Henderson: They used that against us. They used that as their excuse for why they waited for the winds to blow away from the heavily populated areas that they considered to be their economic benefit, and we just didn't happen to fall within that category to them. The test [00:27:00] that affected us the greatest here in Idaho was the Tumbler-Snapper How test done in, believe that was '52.

They shot the bomb off. The fallout went into storm clouds that then carried it over Utah, and as soon as it hit the Owyhees, it split into two, and it rained out over Gem County, Blaine, Custer, and Lemhi Counties. These are all in Idaho. And the third hottest county in the US because of these tests, hottest being most radioactive, uh, most fallout received, the third hottest was Gem County, where I grew up, where my f- mom [00:28:00] grew up.

I'm a seventh-generation Idahoan. And so we got to see firsthand the effects that this had on our communities and the effects that it still has on the communities and people that unfortunately are still fighting for their lives over this.

Libbe HaLevy: How is your family?

Heidi Henderson: My family is good. My mom always says that it's not a matter of if she gets cancer, it's when She was born at the tail end of the nuclear testing.

She witnessed her mom and her brothers have cancer. There were a total of 47 members of my family that lived here during that timeframe who ended up being diagnosed with cancer, some of them dying from it, some of them not, and the youngest [00:29:00] of those was 13 years old.

Libbe HaLevy: I'm so terribly sorry that happened to you and your family, and the community, and all those who- Mm-hmm

suffer from being downwind of the nuclear tests, and all the other forms of contamination. Now, with the talk of, and I love nuclear labeling, I'm always getting on this on this show, Nuclear Lifestyle Innovation Campus. That just sounds like a school where they're going to make things so yummy and so advanced and so positive and so user-friendly, as opposed to labeling it more correctly, which is Nuclear Future Superfund Cleanup Site That You'll Never Clean Up 'Cause You Have No Place to Put the Waste.

It wouldn't fit as a headline, but I think it's a better name for it. With that being the phrase, is that what it's being called, and if so, what are the specifics that are being proposed for your local community, for Idaho?

Leigh Ford: That is what the Department of Energy is calling them. You're right, they have, uh, slick names for [00:30:00] everything.

You know, Yucca Mountain didn't work, their consent-based siting scheme didn't work, consolidated storage didn't work, collaborative siting didn't work, and now, now we have a Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campus, and w- we've been sort of toying around with the names. I mean, it is primarily a dump. Marla Morales, and her title is so long I can't remember it, but she's basically kind of in charge of nuclear energy's disposition, she calls it, program at Department of Energy.

And she used to work for NRC, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. But she said that if states want a life- a campus, then they have to take the waste. And she actually described it like a meal, and said that she considers the enrichment, the reprocessing, and data centers and nuclear reactors all appetizers, but waste has to be your main course.

Libbe HaLevy: That ends up sitting in your stomach forever and poisoning you, but that's another story. [00:31:00]

Leigh Ford: Absolutely. And so I appreciate her honesty, but it's not translating from the state to the people. There was a recent meeting, uh, in Arimo, Idaho. It's in the county where I think they're proposing at least part of the dump campus, maybe just the dump.

It's kinda hard to tell where they're going with it. I'm trying to connect the dots. But- At the meeting, which was really inaccessible for the people of the community because, well, first they had a bunch of technical issues, which doesn't bode well if they're running a nuclear facility, but-

Libbe HaLevy: Me- meaning they couldn't work Zoom?

Leigh Ford: Right, and they couldn't work the audio. It wasn't on Zoom unfortunately. I couldn't go. I was in Duck Valley with Heidi and Heidi's mom doing RICA work with the people there. But I had two board members attend, and they said that in order to ask questions, people, and we're talking farmers and ranchers, had to scan a QR code with a mobile phone and [00:32:00] type in a question, and then they'd screen them and reword them.

And the board member that did go is a nuclear physicist, the other one's a nurse practitioner. But she said that waste was not brought up once. They didn't answer questions, yeah, even though it's the main course. So there is something missing between the communications here. So I, I do want to let people know that waste is the main course.

The Department of Energy isn't lying about that. What our state has proposed is kind of like what Utah... I think you talked with Carmen from HEAL Utah, she's wonderful, enrichment, reprocessing, fuel fabrication. They said data centers, nuclear reactors, so, so kind of an all of the above approach. And, um, you know, when I talk to people about this, they think that reprocessing is gonna solve it, so we've got it all planned out.

What they aren't telling us is that reprocessing takes the dirtiest, [00:33:00] most lethal waste man has ever created, and exposing it to workers and communities, and fiddling around with it, separating out the plutonium and the uranium, which is very dangerous, and it doesn't solve the radioactivity problem and it doesn't solve the waste problem.

It still requires permanent storage.

Libbe HaLevy: It also creates additional waste to the waste that it started with in the separation process. So while the word reprocessing sounds very positive and very recycling and very Earth-conscious, it's a cover-up for the fact that they will just be taking out something they can make money from, and the heck with the additional waste that's being left behind, which is what they always do.

Leigh Ford: Absolutely, and I think they know that. I think the Department of Energy knows that, and it's so expensive and energy intensive to reprocess. I really think they just want it to look like they're doing something, that they have a solution so they [00:34:00] can unleash this whole new nuclear renaissance that they're hoping to achieve.

Libbe HaLevy: They've been calling it a renaissance for a long time, and that just means that something recreates itself as something wonderful and expansive. And the last thing we want is for the nuclear waste to be something expansive. We'll continue this interview with Leigh Ford and Heidi Henderson of Idaho's Snake River Alliance in just a moment.

But first, when it comes to nuclear power, nuclear weapons, radioactive waste, uranium mining, and radiation exposure, finding information you can trust can be a challenge. The nuclear industry has its public relations machine grinding out press releases and stories backed by a million-dollar-plus budget.

Government agencies have their talking points, and mainstream media too often gives these stories only a passing glance or misses them altogether. [00:35:00] That is why Nuclear Hotseat is here. Every week, we bring you information, voices, and perspectives you're unlikely to hear anywhere else. We follow the stories, ask the questions, and do it independently without taking money from the nuclear industry or the government.

But independence is expensive, and in order to continue, we depend on you. Nuclear Hotseat is a nonprofit, and listener donations are what keep this program going. So if you value having an independent source of nuclear information, if this program has ever taught you something, alerted you to something important, or simply reassured you that you're not the only one paying attention, please help support us now.

Go to nuclearhotseat.com and click on that Donate button. Any amount will help. And a monthly donation, even $5 a month, helps give us the financial stability [00:36:00] to keep showing up week after week. You can also donate through Zelle at info@nuclearhotseat.com. Nuclear Hotseat is a 501 non-profit, so your donation is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Because independent information doesn't just appear. Someone has to do the work and make sure that the work can continue. So here's the deal. I'll continue to do the work, and you continue to help make sure Nuclear Hotseat can keep doing it. Please donate today at nuclearhotseat.com and know that I thank you for caring enough to keep this independent voice alive.

Now back to this week's featured interview with Leigh Ford and Heidi Henderson of the Snake River Alliance in Idaho. So it sounds like the DOE has not been very transparent in its outreach and [00:37:00] its communication. What level of compliance or ignorance do you believe that they are aiming for? What do they hope to achieve with the way they are treating the people of your state?

Leigh Ford: Department of Energy officials claim over and over that trust is their number one priority, and community trust is what they achieve for. But honestly, there was only one meeting, one public meeting that I found, and it was in Arimo, Idaho, a very tiny town. Proposed dump location I think might be in Downey, Idaho, which is several miles away, but they don't have a place to have a meeting, so they went to Arimo.

They didn't invite people from Pocatello, which is the biggest city in Bannock County, and who would probably have a lot more pushback if they had been invited. There was a survey sent out around Bannock County to gauge support, and so it was only sent to [00:38:00] Bannock County.

Libbe HaLevy: And what's the significance of Bannock County?

We're not familiar with the counties of Idaho. Oh- We're barely familiar with Idaho

Leigh Ford: Bannock County is in southeastern Idaho, and it, it is where I believe they're looking to put part of the facility. There was a survey sent out to Bannock County residents, and I think somewhere around eight to nine hundred people filled it out.

Mind you, Bannock County does have a significant number of Idaho National Lab employees. And the survey itself, I think, was to gauge acceptance of a project like this. But it did not ask any questions about waste, except there was one question is: What is your primary concern with nuclear energy? And waste was the main concern that people had.

And I don't know if it's the representatives in the state who are not being transparent about the Nuclear Lifecycle Campus being primarily for waste storage and waste processing [00:39:00] or if it's Department of Energy. But Department of Energy is where I found the information that, A, states will have to take out-of-state waste, and there's 100,000 metric tons of it sitting at reactor sites, mostly back east.

And B, that states needed to figure out a way to pay for it, basically that they didn't want states to rely on Department of Energy, and they wanted to protect federal taxpayers. So those are the two main messages that aren't being translated from Department of Energy to the state or from the state to the people.

But we're not getting the whole story, and that is what we deserve. We're not stupid. We're not backwards. We don't hate innovation. We just want the truth

Heidi Henderson: We did some community outreach lately. It was just a couple weekends ago, last weekend I think. And we asked people that showed up [00:40:00] to the Harvest Festival in Emmett if they knew about this, what their thoughts were.

We asked them to sign a non-legal petition to tell our legislators, "Hey, we do not want this waste in Idaho." And we saw an overwhelming amount of people come out and say, "We haven't even heard of this. What are you talking about? We're expected to receive one third of the nation's waste and they haven't even told us?"

And from just a two-day event we were able to get over 150 signatures from people that just came to have a fun weekend at a fair and learned what is going on behind closed doors that they're not really telling us about. Hopefully with some more outreach we'll be able to get those signatures up [00:41:00] and get people aware of what's happening in our backyard.

Libbe HaLevy: What, if any, media coverage has this issue received? And has there been a slant to it where it has been pro let's do this? Or has there been any counter-conversation taking place saying, "You know, we should really know about the waste and stuff." Has there been media involvement in the issues?

Leigh Ford: Thank you.

That's a good question. The media has been interested in this topic, and a lot of them are concerned. It's mostly about the waste again. Most people that I've

talked to, and most of the media stories that I've read aren't against nuclear power, but they're against the nuclear waste. But I mean, you have to have both.

You can't have one and not the other. So yes, there have been some great articles against the nuclear waste coming to Idaho from both Republicans and Democrats and Independents, and a lot of support on that [00:42:00] issue. But being anti-nuclear, connecting that dot, it, it really hasn't happened yet, you know, between the reactor and the waste.

So yeah, that's been my experience.

Libbe HaLevy: You spoke about having done outreach at this Harvest Festival or at local events. Has there been a direct approach to the legislators or to any of the regulating bodies that might exist in Idaho?

Leigh Ford: We did write a letter. We have an action letter for people to write their legislators in Idaho, and I've gotten some feedback from people who have done that action.

And their legislators, some relig- legislators have responded, and again, think that reprocessing is just gonna solve it. So there's definitely a lot of education that needs to happen. But we've been contacted by several candidates who are running against people who have been in for a long time, and they're very concerned and are using it in their campaigns to run against these [00:43:00] guys.

We've also, Monica Church, who I don't know if you, uh, know of our former governor, Cecil Andrus, was one of the last Democratic governors in Idaho, and this is his granddaughter. She married one of Frank Church's descendants. So her name's Monica Church. Frank Church was a powerhouse in our legislature for a long time.

She is very concerned and reached out, and she's been, I think, the strongest in the legislature to activate people against this. But, you know, it's an uphill battle. Idaho National Lab brings in a lot of money to Idaho, and it's hard to get politicians to, again, oppose any kind of creating nuclear waste, but they are, most of them, against bringing more in

Libbe HaLevy: What, if any, connection has been made by the DOE between these, quote-unquote, campuses, or the campus they want to bring to you, and a data center?

Is that part of the thinking as well?

Leigh Ford: Idaho's response to Department of [00:44:00] Energy's request for information includes data centers in its plan, and nuclear to power them. From what I've heard, and I don't know too much about data centers, I'm trying to learn more, but the people that are building them like the idea of nuclear power as a base load.

Unfortunately, they're both notorious water hogs in general, and, you know, you can have closed loop systems for water, but then that takes more energy, and it's a never-ending battle. I think DOE has left it up to states to say what they want, and Idaho is happy to have a data center.

Libbe HaLevy: Right now, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is considering a major weakening of its radiation protection levels, something that the industry has been pushing for and lobbying for for years.

How might this pending wholesale revision of the NRC change things, or will it?

Leigh Ford: This is very concerning for us, the wholesale revision of the [00:45:00] NRC and the reducing of radiation standards. They need to be strengthened. I know Mary Olson and Cindy Fulker, as you've interviewed, um, fantastic ladies, but from what I've learned from them, basic biology, women and children are way more susceptible to the dangers of radiation.

And now they're proposing to weaken the standards, which is going to be very concerning for workers. And while the state is arguing that these nuclear life cycle innovation campuses are gonna bring so many jobs and money to the state, and good, high-paying jobs, what they're not telling us, at the same time, the NRC might just gut their radiation standards.

So this is gonna be putting people and communities at high risk for cancer, higher risk than before. And going to poor communities with high-paying jobs, quote-unquote, that are dangerous and can not only affect them, but their families, they can bring radiation home, they [00:46:00] can carry it through their genes.

It's unimaginable. The NRC is supposed to protect us and protect workers, and they're doing the opposite with this.

Libbe HaLevy: What plans does Snake River Alliance have moving forward to build a campaign or spread the word, or do what needs to be done to start turning this around, at least in terms of awareness in the population?

Heidi Henderson: Some of the work that we are starting to kinda navigate and get people aware of this, we are in the process of making door hangers to get people informed about what these nuclear life cycle innovation campuses are, what it means for them, and actions that they can take to try and oppose this before the upcoming elections in November.

And then that way they have [00:47:00] the most informed decisions that they can make.

Leigh Ford: Yes, we've been trying to get the word out, um, and educate people as much as we can, 'cause we see that there is a big gap in what people know about this in different areas of the state. So we are planning on some different just educational events and teach-ins.

I have been invited by, I think it was the Rotary Club in Emmett and the Democratic Party of Gem County to come speak. So we've been doing speaking on the radio, speaking with you, thank you for having us, talking with the media. We've been talking with a few concerned legislators and candidates who are running against the governor and Senator Risch and Representative Simpson.

And we are planning, maybe long-term, we would like to have a uranium film festival here so that we could have some really meaningful [00:48:00] films and have discussions around the issues that we're facing, we're currently facing because of our nuclear past, but what we might be facing in our nuclear future. But yeah, a lot of it is flying by the seat of our pants, you know, doing things as they come.

You know, we have some good ideas, it's just getting people on the ground. And we're gonna be really busy in the next couple of months because the Department of Energy wants a decision, more of a final formal decision by December on where they're gonna put these dump campuses. So we've got busy work in the next few months.

We're also working with, uh, sorry, the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability and allies there, and the, uh, National Radioactive Waste Coalition with some media and other support.

Libbe HaLevy: Has there ever been an epidemiological report done on any of the areas around Idaho National Labs that would show cancer rates or birth defects or [00:49:00] heart disease or autoimmune diseases, any of the physical signs that radiation has been impacting the health of people living within 50 miles of a nuclear reactor site or a nuclear dump site?

Leigh Ford: That's a great question. I would like to find out. I have talked with, I mean, just my, my daughter's pediatrician did his residency in Eastern Idaho, and h- he said, I mean, so anecdotal information, he noticed a huge percentage of child, different kinds of disorders and things that his hair raised a little bit and w- he was wondering if it was the lab.

Or Simplot. I mean, there's so many things, but maybe Heidi knows better about that. But I would like to find out more about, especially with this new upcoming rule change with the NRC.

Heidi Henderson: I wanna say that there was some epidemiological studies done in the early to mid-'90s when [00:50:00] there was a huge push from people to understand the effects of the nuclear fallout from the Nevada test site.

There was a lot of research put in. Can't remember the name of the man who did the research.

Libbe HaLevy: Might that have been Joe Mangano?

Heidi Henderson: Rich Miller, that's his name. He did studies on iodine-131 and looked at associated health risks and stuff in the area. He ended up writing several books about this that my mom has sitting on her shelf, along with many other Idaho and nuclear-related text.

But I'm not 100% what those results showed, aside from what the hot counties were for iodine-131 exposure. I don't re- recall what any of the medical results might have shown from [00:51:00] those tests that were run From a standpoint of anecdotal hearing from people in the communities that were impacted by this exposure, lots of cancers, brain cancers, autoimmune diseases, things that back in that timeframe, they were like, "Well, there's these, these clusters of people that are getting really sick with something that we would only see from radiation workers or people that were directly exposed to uranium in the mines."

And they're going, "Well, you've not had any interaction with this stuff, so why, where is this coming from?" And then they started realizing, oh, well, it's because of all of this nuclear testing that was done on us and without our

knowledge. And [00:52:00] luckily, State of Idaho got included in the compensation, and is able to, uh, get some reparations for their torment, even though it's not enough.

Libbe HaLevy: Nothing can ever be enough. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you think is important to add at this time?

Leigh Ford: We're actively working with Tona Henderson, Heidi's mom, Idaho Downwinders, and connecting these nuclear dots like I have been. But we are actually, Duck Valley Indian Reservation was left out of WRECA basically because it's half in Nevada and half in Idaho, and you can't prove that you live on the Idaho side when you are on the reservation because of the way they do their addresses, and their PO boxes are in Nevada, and it was just a mess.

And so I'm really happy to have met Tona and started working on this, and hopefully with Duck [00:53:00] Valley we can get them some justice. Um, it's been really hard work traveling around the state and meeting people who have lost their entire families, and some people are the last people left. And- Excuse me.

It's been really good work, but this industry is, um, is death. Sorry.

Libbe HaLevy: Don't be. It's the appropriate response to be upset, to be hurt, to wanna cry, to wanna rage, and hopefully use that emotional energy to move into energy in the physical world, which is exactly what the two of you are doing, what I am doing, and what so many others around the country, around the world are doing simultaneously.

It's just the overall picture has not yet come together of exactly how many we are, how many places we are, how pervasive the problems are, how [00:54:00] consistent the problems are. It's not just in one and one and one. It's all of us dealing with the same group of issues all the time. So the fact that you have had some emotion breakthrough on this, I think is an extremely appropriate modeling of how we all deserve to feel about all of this And you did bring up something important that I wanted to get to.

What, if any, involvement have the indigenous communities in Idaho had to this process? Has there been any outreach to them, or have they been, as you just explained, ignored because of artificial boundaries between states?

Leigh Ford: From what I've heard, Idaho National Lab and Department of Energy has reached out to the Shoshone-Bannock.

Don't know beyond that. Duck Valley is kind of south of Mountain Home. It's sort of in the middle of Boise and Fort Hall, in the middle. But I don't think they've been talked to at [00:55:00] all about it. I've talked to them a little bit about it. I think it's hard for Fort Hall, 'cause they're over there. Fort Hall Indian Reservation is, um, near Pocatello.

It's Southeast Idaho. It's very strong support for Idaho National Lab in the area. They do employ a lot of people there, and it's hard to speak out against it really, honestly, and not get some sort of feedback.

Libbe HaLevy: Hopefully not because of a bumper sticker on your car.

Leigh Ford: Yeah. You know, I've gotten some dirty looks over there, but that...

My whole family's from Idaho Falls, so, um, I- they have to deal with me, I guess.

Libbe HaLevy: Heidi, did you have anything that you wanted to add to the conversation at this point that we haven't covered?

Heidi Henderson: I would say some things that we have in the works are getting youth more involved and having them really have a voice and an understanding of [00:56:00] what this means for them to have this waste essentially given to them to be responsible for, and really trying to drive home, like, even though this is something that's being proposed for Southern Idaho, it's still going to impact people up further North, and Central, and Northern Idaho as well, and getting kids who are in 4H and Future Farmers of America, and the ag communities who this is going to be their livelihood on the line- And show them if this is the direction you're going with your careers, this is going to impact you significantly.

And your voice, even though you're young, you still have a say in what can happen. And getting them out doing [00:57:00] advocacy, doing art contests, making political cartoons, which have always been a great way of showcasing talent and views without being too harsh. And I think that that is a great way to ensure our upcoming future has more of a stake in what goes on here in Idaho.

Libbe HaLevy: If people want to get in touch with you and find out more, where can they go?

Leigh Ford: They can go to our website, snakeriveralliance.org. They can also follow us on Instagram and Facebook, less so on Twitter. Maybe one day

TikTok, I don't know. Um, and they can find more of, uh, some of our videos, webinars, and things like that on our YouTube.

Libbe HaLevy: We will of course link with Snake River Alliance and perhaps one or two of the resources that you have mentioned, [00:58:00] including some of those books on your mother's shelf, Heidi. For now, Leigh Ford and Heidi Henderson, it has been great having you here with us today on Nuclear Hotseat.

Leigh Ford: Thanks so much for having us.

Heidi Henderson: Thank you, Libbe. It was great talking with you.

Libbe HaLevy: Leigh Ford and Heidi Henderson of Idaho's Snake River Alliance. You can find them online at snakeriveralliance.org. This has been Nuclear Hotseat for Tuesday, October 6th, 2026. Sign up to get Nuclear Hotseat delivered via email every week as soon as it posts by going to nuclearhotseat.com, put in your first name and email address in the opt-in box, and every week you'll get one email with the link and a short description of the show's content.

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No one is immune to its negative impact on their health. We have no safe way of storing or neutralizing it, and still, we're creating more of it every day, every minute, even right now. There you have it, your weekly nuclear wake-up call. So whatever you do, don't go back to sleep, because we are [01:00:00] all in the Nuclear Hotseat.

Nuclear Hotseat theme: Nuclear Hotseat. What are those people thinking? Nuclear Hotseat. What have those boys been drinking? Nuclear Hotseat. The corium is sinking. Our time to act is shrinking, but our activists are linking.

Nuclear Hotseat. It's da bomb