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The saga of the Apollo Nuclear Fabrication Facility operated by the now defunct Nuclear Materials and Equipment Corporation (NUMEC) demonstrates the perplexing nature of the de-industrialization of complex industrial sites and serves as an acute warning that past methods of planning for the retirement of such sites was woefully inadequate. The pitiful sign above hangs in Parks Township, Pennsylvania marking the Shallow Land Disposal Area (SLDA) where wastes from a nuclear fuel fabrication facility in nearby Apollo, Pennsylvania was interred from 1961–1970. None of the original operators of the site today stands accountable for the quagmire of uranium, plutonium and other radioactive materials buried in Apollo. Places operating today similar to the SLDA in Apollo Pennsylvania demand that leaders prepare for the hazards these sites pose to future generations.



Photo courtesy of Patty Ameno for Al-Jazeera America

In the 1960's Patty Ameno grew up in the house across the street from the NUMEC plant that manufactured nuclear fuel to satisfy America's growing demand. Radioactive waste there was stored in accordance with Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) regulations of the era, perhaps in the unmarked barrels outside the plant in Patty's Easter day photo. Residual nuclear material was later buried in the SLDA with poor accountability and little oversight. The AEC that regulated nuclear waste at the time no longer exists and NUMEC transformed over the decades, first into the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) and subsequently into Babcock and Wilcox (B&W), which later became BWX Technologies (BWXT) so today no one knows exactly what is contained in the waste site, or how much of it is there. (www.nrc.gov). Patty Ameno left Apollo to serve in the US Navy and upon her return took up the crusade to rid her hometown of the nuclear waste left abandoned in the ground by the Cold-War era weapons factory. Her father asked her to look into the health risks of the plant and she started documenting resident's health issues in 1988. Two years later the property's owner erected a fence to stop local residents from using the dumpsite as a recreational area as they had for decades not

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knowing below the field lay buried drums of radioactive waste. Twenty-five years later the cleanup still has not really begun. america.aljazeera.com .



Residents of Park Township live literally across the street from one of the most toxic de-industrialization sites in the United States. US taxpayers will bear the cost of the cleanup that has ballooned from original estimates of \$40 million to as much as \$500 million according to ACE spokesperson Dan Brown.



Photo from WSJ.com

(www.post-gazette.com) For many years, locals had no idea they were walking their dogs and playing baseball right above barrels of nuclear material the Army Corps of Engineers admitted “were far more complex and of greater quantity than originally expected.” (foreignpolicy.com) After decades of Patty Ameno’s personal crusade, residents of this Pennsylvania Township are demanding action.



Americans living in neighborhoods with similar toxic waste disposal sites should do the same. Knowledge of the enduring danger of radioactive materials



Residents meeting with ACE officials

and the huge costs involved in proper storage thereof should prompt policy makers to learn from the debacle at Apollo and craft regulations anticipating a repeat of such situations in the future.

Most disturbing about the site in Apollo is that NUMEC could not account for hundreds of pounds of radioactive uranium nor clearly explain the loss. In the 1960s, investigators from the AEC began to question how large amounts of weapons-grade uranium had gone missing from NUMEC. Any nuclear site had a certain amount of loss, from seepage into walls and floors but investigators found that NUMEC lost more than at any other plant. In 1978, NUMEC’s founder told Arizona Congressman Morris Udall that the uranium simply escaped through the facility’s air ducts, cement, and wastewater. These comments could have been an explanation for a host of ailments Patty Ameno documented possibly related to exposure to radioactive materials suffered by former employees and local residents. Her efforts have “helped organize litigation that resulted in more than \$80 million in payments to her

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and scores of neighbors claiming health damage from radioactive contamination.” www.wsj.com Alternatively, his testimony could have been part of a cover-up for the theft of the material by Israel as part of its covert nuclear weapons development program. The AEC and its successors, Congress, the FBI, the CIA, and other government agencies have investigated the issue for more than fifty years however; no conclusive explanation has ever arisen. (foreignpolicy.com)

Whether the lost uranium is in the residents and environment of Apollo or in an Israeli nuclear weapon does not change the fact that weapons-grade uranium and plutonium remain in the ground in Parks Township. A report released by the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission's own investigators reveals disturbingly inept federal management of the SLDA and highlights the urgent need to reform federal policy regarding nuclear waste disposal sites. (www.nrc.gov) The U.S. has 71,862 tons of nuclear waste spread all over the United States. www.huffingtonpost.com In Parks Township Pennsylvania, history has given a clear lesson regarding the folly of weak oversight of nuclear waste disposal sites and an urgent call to action.

