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**Nuclear pollution in Russia is 'out of rational control'**

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The fact that the former Soviet Union was not exactly careful about the way in which nuclear waste products were handled is an old story.

But little attention has been paid to the current state of nuclear pollution in Russia today. In fact, it may be worse than ever.

Radioactivity at a highly dangerous level has been detected in some of the waterways flowing from a Russian nuclear complex in Siberia. The level is said to be higher than would come from 10,000 commercial nuclear reactors.

Russian and US nuclear watchdog groups said this week: "We were shocked at the levels of contamination."

Tom Carpenter, director of the Government Accountability Project's office in Seattle, Washington, who helped conduct tests of water in the Tom and Romashka rivers, reported evidence showing that pollution from the Siberian Chemical Complex constitutes the highest level of nuclear contamination of a waterway anywhere in the world.

They have demanded an immediate end to the dumping of nuclear waste from the complex, which was the site of secret nuclear weapons development during the Soviet years and where an explosion in 1993 spread radioactivity over a very large area.

Carpenter said in an interview that levels were too high to have originated at a nuclear power plant or from normal reprocessing activities and suggested the possible presence at the site of an unacknowledged nuclear weapons- grade reactor or giant nuclear accelerator.

The exact source of the radioactivity was not determined during testing in August by environmentalists from the US group and the Siberian Scientists for Global Responsibility.

The Government Accountability Project is a nongovernmental legal and environmental group that watches the nuclear industry and defends nuclear whistle-blowers. The Siberian group is a nongovernmental organization that monitors nuclear pollution.

Calling the radioactive problem "out of rational control," the groups also urged the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, Austria, to send an emergency response team to cordon off areas of high contamination and determine the level of danger to humans from food contamination.

Scientists took samples in cattle-grazing and fishing areas; they found fish with levels of radioactivity more than 20 times normal. The analyses also showed strontium 90 in plant life along the Romashka River at levels of 10,000 picocuries per liter, the report said. The permissible level for US drinking water is 8 piocuries per liter. Dangerous levels of phosphorous 32 also were found.

"The magnitude of the reported... release of beta radioactivity to the River Tom is staggering," the report said, many times greater than other known nuclear pollution problems in Russia or the pollution of the Columbia River from the Hanford, Washington, nuclear reservation.

The conclusions were based on laboratory examination of samples conducted in Russia, Canada and the US.

Norm Buske, a physicist and oceanographer with the watchdog group, said the nuclear waste was being "straight- piped'' into the environment. "This has not been done anywhere in the world since the Cold War," Buske said.

Local residents call the Siberian complex "the largest and greatest nuclear facility in the world.'' During the years of the Soviet Union it had five nuclear reactors and produced weapons-grade plutonium. Two nuclear reactors continue to produce electrical power for surrounding communities, but they could not account for the extremely high radiation levels, Buske said.

So far there has been no official reaction to the situation on the part of the Russian government, although the findings were widely reported in Russian newspapers as well as via TV and radio news broadcasts.

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