



# THE FOLDED CRANE

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility | Spring 2016

## Enormous Victories for Oregon PSR's Healthy Climate Program

*Regna Merritt, Health Climate Program Director*

2016 has been a great year for Oregon PSR's Healthy Climate Program thus far! Growing resistance to fossil fuel projects, combined with the low price of oil, has led to some very exciting developments.

In January, Oregon PSR brought the voice of medicine to two huge public hearings regarding the Tesoro Savage Vancouver Energy proposal planned for Vancouver, WA. This would be the largest oil-by-rail facility in the US, with oil trains likely passing through Oregon every day. By the end of the comment period, opponents of this dangerous proposal had submitted over 280,000 comments. At Oregon PSR's request, the City of Portland and Multnomah County submitted comments opposing this project that threatens the health and safety of residents throughout our region.

Derailments and explosions of oil tanker cars have led to the deaths of 47 people, the evacuation of thousands, billions of dollars of property damage, and the shutdown of several drinking water supplies throughout North America.

Oregon PSR led coalition efforts to secure a Multnomah County study of the potential blast zone and a County resolution opposing oil trains. Chair Deborah Kafoury and Commissioner Jules Bailey championed these actions. We learned through a briefing report developed by the Offices of Sustainability, Public Health and Emergency Management that there are already 12 trains and 1 million gallons of oil traveling through the county each week, with smaller shipments going unreported.



*Orvie Danzuka of Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs addresses the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners.  
Photo courtesy of Multnomah County.*

The County's report also identified that 26% of Multnomah County residents live within an evacuation zone of 1/2 mile from the tracks. People of color are more likely to live in the evacuation zone. 108 schools and 100 childcare facilities are within this zone.

County staff also calculated that the annual carbon footprint of the Tesoro

*(continued on page 3)*

## Whistleblower Letter Undercuts Nuclear Plant Managers' Credibility

*Chuck Johnson, Nuclear Power Task Force Director*

The Columbia Generating Station, a GE boiling water reactor of similar design to the faulty reactors that melted down in Fukushima, Japan, has been operating on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation for the last 33 years. It has been under fire since the Fukushima accident in 2011 as critics, including Oregon PSR, have called for its closure.

The plant's operator, Energy Northwest, a consortium of 27 Washington public

power utilities formerly known as the Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS—pronounced “whoops”), has circled the wagons, putting forward a relentless stream of positive public relations stories to the press. This united wall of support suffered an enormous crack when an anonymous letter was sent to board members and the press. The letter claims to have been written by a group of the nuclear power plant's workers and charges that management has

been hiding a serious decline in safety and operating efficiency at the plant.

Here is an excerpt of the story as reported by Annette Cary on January 29<sup>th</sup> of this year in the *Tri-City Herald*:

“The...letter...reminds board members that Energy Northwest was rated as one of two nuclear plants in the nation in greatest need of operational and human performance improvement in 2010.

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Dear Oregon PSR Supporter,

It sure feels good to win sometimes! Oregon PSR is celebrating some significant victories over the last few months. In this issue of *The Folded Crane*, you can learn more about the tremendous success our Healthy Climate Program has had in kicking dirty, toxic coal out of our state, engaging the Portland City Council and the Multnomah County Commission to pass groundbreaking resolutions on oil trains and fossil fuel infrastructure, and preventing other fossil fuel proposals from progressing. You'll also find out about some interesting developments at the Columbia Generating Station, the last remaining commercial nuclear power plant in the Northwest, which we are working to shutter as early as possible. This edition of our newsletter also includes invitations to join us for upcoming events to improve our air quality and the health of our climate, as well as to celebrate the winners of our annual Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship.

Oregon PSR's Environmental Health Work Group has sprung into action in response to the recent air toxics revelations in Portland, advocating for long overdue standards that are protective of human health and creating new factsheets on the effects of toxics like arsenic and cadmium.

We are thrilled to have worked with coalition partners to pass the Clean Electricity and Coal Transition Bill, which will speed up Oregon's transition away from coal and towards cleaner renewable energy technologies. My sincere thanks to all of you who wrote, emailed, called and otherwise weighed in on this important piece of legislation. It was truly a collective effort and wouldn't have happened without you!

Central to Oregon PSR's mission is our work for a more peaceful world. In our



*Oregon PSR Executive Director Kelly Campbell participates in a protest action against a Shell icebreaker ship bound for the Arctic.*

efforts to engage the next generation in this crucial work, I am pleased to announce that we have had a great response to our 2016 Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship, with nearly a hundred entries coming in from high schools students throughout Oregon in response to this year's question regarding the interconnection of peace and climate change. Please mark your calendars and plan to join us to award the scholarship winners and celebrate the voices of young leaders on Friday, April 29<sup>th</sup>, which is always our most inspiring and energizing event of the year.

I hope that you find this edition of *The Folded Crane* to be both informative and uplifting. We certainly have our work to create a healthier and more peaceful world cut out for us, but with your continued engagement, we are doing just that. Thank you!

In Peace and Health,

Kelly Campbell, Executive Director

## Enormous Victories for Oregon PSR's Healthy Climate Program *(continued from page 1)*

Savage proposal represents three times the County's total annual greenhouse gas emissions and, over the lifetime of the project, will cost over \$1.5 billion dollars in adverse effects globally, with significant impacts felt locally.

On January 21<sup>st</sup>, after a spirited debate before an overflow crowd, Multnomah County commissioners unanimously passed a powerful resolution amidst loud applause. Multnomah County is the first and largest county to officially oppose oil-by-rail and the proposed Tesoro Savage oil terminal.

Our work to prevent the Tesoro Savage project continues. The Port of Vancouver has the authority to terminate the lease agreement without penalty by August 1<sup>st</sup>. Port commissioners can become environmental and public health champions if they take this action. Oregon PSR's health advocates

and our partners will continue our full-court press at bi-monthly meetings, encouraging the port commissioners to do the right thing.

### Protecting the Columbia River and Our Climate

In February, we attended another packed-house meeting, this one at the Port of Longview. There we celebrated the strength of our powerful and growing movement as commissioners voted down *two* fossil fuel terminals proposed for the Columbia River. Our coalition helped stave off the threat of the first oil refinery on the Columbia River. We also defeated the third proposal within the last year for a dangerous propane export terminal on the Columbia River. Oregon PSR provided important health-based testimony opposing these climate-busting proposals.

Each one of these victories sends a strong message to polluting fossil fuel industries: Oregon PSR and our partners have the power to defeat dirty, dangerous proposals. Next up? We're working to defeat the Millennium Bulk Terminals (MBT) coal export terminal proposal. Oregonians will feel local impacts of long, uncovered trains carrying 44 million tons of coal each year to Longview, as well as the related changes to our climate.

The MBT Draft Environmental Impact Statement will be released for public comment in late April. We will keep you posted to help analyze these documents, provide written comments and generate record-breaking turnout at a public meeting on May 24<sup>th</sup>.

Thank you so much for all that you have done to protect our air, our water and our climate!

## Agency Left Citizens Unprotected from Toxins

*Susan Katz, MD and Joel Nigg, PhD, Oregon PSR Board Members*

*This article originally appeared as a letter to the editor in the March 16<sup>th</sup> edition of The Portland Tribune.*

"Recent documentation of the contamination of Portland's air with toxic cadmium and arsenic is alarming. More alarming was the initial response by state agencies. While the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality confirmed a past problem, the agency still leaves significant unanswered questions.

The levels of allowable chemicals in the air should be health protective. What levels of arsenic and cadmium are still in the air? How long and how extensively was the air contaminated? How contaminated is the soil today?

Which pollutants were absorbed by the residents and to what extent? Where else might there be hot spots in the city, county and state?

Without answers to these questions, state and local agencies cannot reassure people about their risk for negative health consequences. We are very concerned that the Oregon Health Authority seems to focus only on cancer risks. This avoids and ignores other well-documented risks which are chronic and may arise long after exposure to high levels of cadmium and arsenic, causing damage to the heart, lungs and skin, as well as the immune, endocrine or hormonal systems, and the brain. These toxins can permanently interfere with or derail neurodevelopment, especially

in the fetus and in young children. Thus pregnant women, and all women of reproductive age, are vulnerable.

Recent revelations serve as a wake up call to our elected officials. Protections from toxic chemicals are completely inadequate. Today we have the opportunity and the moral obligation to require long overdue changes in the operation of Oregon DEQ, so that it will have an adequate mandate and resources to set and enforce health-based standards, as the states of Washington and California have done."

To learn more about the human health effects of toxics like cadmium and arsenic, visit [www.oregonpsr.org](http://www.oregonpsr.org) to download our new toxic chemicals factsheets.



## Hear from Oregon's Youth on Peace and Climate Change on April 29<sup>th</sup>

Join us in celebrating a new generation of activists at Oregon PSR's 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship Awards Ceremony on Friday, April 29<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 - 8:00 PM at First Unitarian Church's Buchan Reception Hall (1226 SW Salmon Street in Portland). The ceremony is free and open to the public, and donations are gratefully

accepted. The keynote speaker for the event is award-winning journalist Dahr Jamail. We will also hear from the high school student winners of the 2016 Greenfield Peace Writing Scholarship.

Open to Oregon high school juniors and seniors, this year's scholarship asked students to respond to the following:

"How would a successful movement to confront climate change help create a more just and peaceful world?"

Join us for remarks by Dahr Jamail, light hors d'oeuvres, tabling by Oregon PSR and partner organizations, and a chance to hear from Oregon's youth leaders for climate justice and peace.

## Whistleblower Letter Undercuts Nuclear Plant Managers' Credibility *(continued from page 1)*

Its INPO [Institute of Nuclear Power Operations] index rating improved as a new leadership team...was put to work. However, the improvement was not sustained, the letter said.

"We have seen a steady decline of the index with a return to low levels," the letter said, adding that the plant has ranked in the bottom 25 of the nation's 99 operating commercial reactors since the end of July.

That coincides with the conclusion of a refueling outage that was planned to be longer than usual. Energy Northwest's intent was to improve productivity long-term, but the longer outage would reduce productivity short-term.

However, the outage had unanticipated consequences. It lasted longer than planned, and the plant was operated at reduced power for several weeks after the outage as a stuck valve was repaired. Index points also were lost because of worker exposure to radiation.

By September, the plant's INPO rating had dropped to the 85<sup>th</sup> worst in the nation, the letter said.

Three months later, employees were told it then was ranked among the bottom 25 plants because of two pinhole fuel leaks discovered in the fall, according to the letter.



*Side-by-side comparisons of the GE boiling water nuclear reactors at the Columbia Generating Station (left) and at Fukushima (right) reveal a similar design. Photos courtesy of CLUI (left) and Fukushima Update (right).*

The letter accuses management of keeping the plant online at all costs, pointing to the decision to continue operating at 65% power during the valve repair. Unwanted material that got into the reactor core during the valve repair may have been responsible for the pinhole leaks."

### Board Members Furious, Oregon PSR Seeks to Press Advantage

At a special meeting of the 11-member Energy Northwest Executive Board held on January 26<sup>th</sup>, the board decided to hire a special investigator to look into the lengthy and detailed charges contained in the whistleblowers' 3-page letter. The board met the next day, with many members complaining about being excluded from the previous night's meeting and skeptical of CEO Mark Reddemann's explanation that he and his staff had not hidden the declining performance of the nuclear plant from the board, but had merely been communicating it differently and,

in hindsight, perhaps had not explained that well enough.

Three and a half years of work by our Joint Nuclear Power Task Force in investigating and presenting reports on seismic dangers, costs, plant design problems, and radioactive waste storage hazards did less to damage the reputation of the CGS than this letter did in one day at the Energy Northwest board meeting. Our reports gained credibility among the utility leaders that govern the operation of that plant.

The whistleblower letter, along with the economic reality that this plant, which is aging and in constant need of repair—and is not cost effective in today's glutted and low-priced energy market—is signaling the beginning of the end of the CGS. We will be doing all we can to hasten the end of this dangerous reactor, and we will be calling on you to help us in protecting the Columbia River and the Mid-Columbia Basin from a nuclear disaster.



# Oregon Kisses Coal Goodbye!

Kelly Campbell, Executive Director

With the passage of the Clean Electricity and Coal Transition Bill by the Oregon legislature this month, Oregon PSR is celebrating a major victory for public health and our climate! Thanks to the many Oregon PSR members who submitted testimony, contacted your legislators and communicated with the media, resulting in Oregon passing the first ever state level legislation to transition away from coal and towards renewable energy. This bill came about due to our coalition's strength in collecting signatures to put a similar measure on the November 2017 ballot, which prompted the affected utilities to support the measure as a legislative bill in order to avoid a fight at the ballot box. Oregon PSR was proud to bring the voice of health professionals to the Renew Oregon coalition and other partnerships to achieve this healthy climate milestone.

Below is an excerpt from an opinion editorial in support of the Clean Electricity and Coal Transition Bill by Oregon PSR member Mona J. McArdle, MD, which ran in the *Medford Mail-Tribune* on February 28<sup>th</sup> of this year.

"Today, Oregon relies on dirty, out-of-state coal-fired power plants for roughly one-third of our electricity. Pacific Power, the large utility that serves many of us, burns coal for two-thirds of its power. While these coal-fired power plants are not located in Oregon, but in states across the West, we know that dangerous coal pollution does not stop at state borders. Transitioning our state from a reliance on coal is a critical step we can take to reduce coal pollution and protect health across the region.

Coal-fired plants account for more than 30% of our nation's total carbon



Governor Kate Brown signs the Clean Electricity and Coal Transition Bill. Photo courtesy of Renew Oregon.

pollution, directly contributing to climate disruption that has the potential to exacerbate public health threats here in Oregon and across the globe. From respiratory illness such as asthma or emphysema to cardiovascular disease and even premature death, the consequences of burning coal are clear for physicians like me. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that 440,000 children and adults are hospitalized each year, with asthma being the primary diagnosis for hospitalization, and 10.6 million visits were made to physicians specifically for asthma.

Scientists studying the effects of mercury on neurodevelopment found that 15.7% of all babies born in the US have elevated levels of mercury. This is only one of at least 50 toxic chemical emissions from coal, which can trigger impairment of brain development from fetus through childhood.

These illnesses disproportionately affect the most vulnerable in our communities, including young

children and the elderly. Unless we act to confront these growing threats, these health impacts will only grow worse in a compromised environment and rapidly warming world.

Transitioning away from coal-fired power and increasing the amount of clean, renewable energy to power our communities will protect future generations from the damaging health impacts of coal pollution.

The beginning of this transition will endow our children with cleaner air to breathe, and the Clean Electricity and Coal Transition Bill gives us hope that we may leave their children a world with a less volatile climate.

Perhaps what is most remarkable is that this bill is supported by utilities who were once resistant to phasing out coal, environmental advocates, a chorus of Oregon business leaders and communities affected by climate change and air pollution."

# Volunteer Spotlight: Nicki Nabavizadeh, MD

*Regna Merritt, Healthy Climate Program Director*

Meet Dr. Nicki Nabavizadeh, who is finishing her second year of pediatric residency at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU). Originally from Norman, Oklahoma, she graduated with an undergraduate degree in Environmental Engineering before attending medical school.

Nicki has found great joy in working with children and their families. Wanting to engage in both health care and community support, she began volunteer work with Oregon PSR in 2014 when she testified to the Department of Environmental Quality in Boardman in opposition to a proposed coal export facility.

In 2015 she chose to work with us during an elective rotation within her residency program, completing both research and program work. On

November 4<sup>th</sup>, Nicki joined other Oregon PSR health professional members to testify before the Portland City Council in support of a resolution opposing oil-by-rail trains in our region. Later the same day, the council voted unanimously to oppose oil train transport through Portland and Vancouver and to oppose the dangerous Tesoro Savage oil-by-rail facility proposed for Vancouver.

Nicki stated, in part, “I feel it is my duty to speak up about the potential irreversible harm our children may face because of climate change. Many pediatricians across the nation share my concern. In fact our national organization, The American Academy of Pediatrics, this month released a statement encouraging health care professionals, local and national legislatures, and community advocates to help blunt the



health hazards associated with climate change in any way possible... As a pediatrician and concerned citizen, I hope that we can continue to educate ourselves on the health dangers of climate change and steer Portland away from infrastructure leading to climate change—to not only keep our children healthy locally, but also globally.”

We are so grateful to Dr. Nabavizadeh for her valuable work to protect our climate and our children’s health!

## Protect our Climate: Keep Fossil Fuels In the Ground

**Ongoing:** Testify before Port of Vancouver Commissioners the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesdays of each month regarding health impacts of the proposed Tesoro Savage oil-by-rail facility, which would be the largest in the nation.

**April 19<sup>th</sup>:** Oregon PSR Health Forum in Longview, WA with Dr. Divya Bappanad (PeaceHealth), Dr. Dan Jaffe (UW-Bothell), and Eric de Place (Sightline). Learn about a new coal dust study and the dangers of particulate matter pollution along the coal train route and at the proposed coal export site in Longview, WA.

**April 30<sup>th</sup>:** Release of Draft Environmental Statement (DEIS) for Millennium Bulk Terminals (MBT) Longview coal export terminal. All hands on deck!

**May 24<sup>th</sup>:** Public hearings in Longview for MBT DEIS.

**June 27<sup>th</sup> - July 29<sup>th</sup>:** Energy Facility Siting Evaluation Council adjudication process on Tesoro oil-by-rail project proposed for Vancouver, WA.

**July:** Release of US Army Corps MBT DEIS.

**August:** Public hearings on above.

## Monthly Giving Donor Profile



“Although long a member, I started a monthly regular contribution to Oregon PSR just this year. I find it remarkably convenient. I don’t need to concern myself about when or how much to contribute, and the monthly receipt emailed to me from Network for Good makes me feel good, as well. This is an unexpected “side effect” of being an organized donor, besides the obvious one of allowing the staff to budget accurately for all of our good work.”

-Susan Katz, MD

Becoming a monthly donor is easy! You can sign up for monthly donations directly through our website, or call us at (503) 274-2720 or email Sean Tenney, Associate Director, at [sean@oregonpsr.org](mailto:sean@oregonpsr.org) for more details.



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