

The page you are loo
changed, or is temp

[Classifieds](#) [Careers](#) [Cars](#) [Homes](#) [Apartments](#) [GoVols](#) [GoLadyVols](#)

Search site for:

[Home](#) [News](#) [Opinion](#) [Community](#) [Business](#) [Sports](#) [Lifestyles](#) [Entertainment](#)

[OPINION](#)

[Today's Editorial](#)
[Letters to Editor](#)
[Columnists](#)

Previous Columnists
[Tuesday, Dec 11](#)
[Sunday, Dec 9](#)
[Friday, Dec 7](#)
[Wednesday, Dec 5](#)

[PRINT THIS STORY](#) | [E-MAIL THIS STORY](#)

Nuclear response team is suddenly silent

By Frank Munger, News-Sentinel Senior writer

In the three months since Sept. 11, much has been written about the future of terrorism - with speculation that the next big threat may come from crudely fashioned nuclear weapons or explosives that splatter radioactive debris all over the place.

If there is a nuclear terrorism attack, you can bet the Radiation Emergency Assistance Center/Training Site (REACT) will be integrally involved in the response. But the Oak Ridge institution has been unusually low key this fall and that's by design, not wishing to draw attention to its work or potential role in terrorism response.

Whatever discussions are taking place behind the scenes regarding strategies or preparations, the folks at REACTS aren't sharing those publicly.

"Because of the heightened security, we're just being extra cautious," spokeswoman Pam Bonee said.

The radiation experts have turned down interview requests from a number of major news organizations, including such notables as "60 Minutes" and - ahem - The Knoxville News-Sentinel.

REACTS is a part of the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education and is funded largely by the U.S. Department of Energy. It also collaborates with the World Health Organization and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"The center's specially trained team of physicians, nurses, health physicists, radiobiologists and emergency coordinators is prepared around the clock to provide assistance on either the local, national or international level," according to info on the Web site for Oak Ridge Associated Universities, which manages the institute for DOE.

In the event of an accident or attack, the Oak Ridge center would provide a medical response in support of other emergency units - such as NEST (Nuclear Emergency Search Team), RAP (Radiological Assistance Program) and FRMAC (Federal Radiological Monitoring and Assessment Center).

The Oak Ridge staff, headed by Dr. Robert Ricks, has taught radiation-response courses for hundreds of physicians and other medical specialists at hospitals in the United States and many other countries.

*

FEAR OF FLYING: Gene Hoffman, a retired Energy Department official, is concerned that DOE hasn't evaluated the potential consequences of a large airplane crash at sites where thousands of containers of depleted uranium hexafluoride are stored.

About 14,000 cylinders of depleted UF6 are stored outdoors at DOE's K-25 Site in Oak Ridge, and even greater numbers are housed at facilities in Paducah, Ky., and Portsmouth, Ohio.

Hoffman is pushing the government to include such a worst-case scenario in the environmental impact statement for a project that

Please try the followi

- If you typed t that it is spell
- Open the [we](#) the informati
- Click the [Bac](#)

HTTP 404 - File not f
Internet Information

Technical Informatior

will convert the uranium compounds to a more stable chemical form for long-term storage or disposal.

He said he first raised the issue a couple of years ago and those concerns were amplified by the events of Sept. 11.

An airplane crash would likely rupture many of the thin-walled containers and result in a massive release of fluorides and other toxic materials into the atmosphere, Hoffman said.

"It would be a very serious problem," he said.

*

BADGE OF COURAGE: Among the winners at Oak Ridge National Laboratory's Awards Night was Kathy Rosenbalm, executive secretary for the Spallation Neutron Source.

Rosenbalm received the Secretarial Support Award for "unparalleled administrative competence, strong leadership and an unfailing cheerful attitude."

I can testify to Rosenbalm's cheerful attitude because she's even pleasant to members of the news media, and that can be thankless effort.

Here's an example:

A couple of years ago, while I was visiting the SNS project office for an interview with then-Executive Director David Moncton, Rosenbalm inadvertently gave me a partial copy of a draft report - a report I apparently wasn't supposed to see. I returned that draft report in order to get the rest of another report I had actually requested, but I later - of course - requested the full draft report I had seen only briefly.

This didn't sit well with the SNS leadership, and Moncton argued mightily that I shouldn't have access to a draft report on the project's progress. But eventually, after some prodding by DOE, he released the report.

I don't know this for a fact, but I have every reason to believe that Rosenbalm got chewed out for the mix-up which led to a news story some folks didn't want to see.

Whether she did or did not, her demeanor never changed in subsequent encounters. She was pleasant as ever, and it's hard not to applaud that kind of professionalism.

I add my congratulations for the deserved award.

Copyright 2001 The Knoxville News-Sentinel Co.
[Click for permission to reprint](#)

December 12, 2001

[MORE MUNGER COLUMNS »](#)

Copyright © 1999-2001
The Knoxville News-Sentinel Co. All Rights Reserved.
[Privacy Policy](#) and [User Agreement](#)