

Remarks by ERIK JOHNSON
to Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board
Public Hearing on December 10, 2013
Knoxville Convention Center, Knoxville, Tennessee

My name is Erik Johnson. I live in Maryville, Tennessee with my wife Libby. We have five grown children and four grandchildren.

For more than a quarter of a century I have been an active participant of the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance (OREPA) nonviolent community that seeks a world of peace where all life is revered and safeguarded.

Thank you for this opportunity to share some thoughts arising from questions concerning the safety of the facilities at Y12 National Security Complex, primarily the planned construction of the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF).

One of the most difficult lessons to be learned at this juncture in the ongoing operations of Y12 and the efforts to build the UPF, is that it is not easy to be hopeful.

It is not easy to find a way out of dangerous operating conditions in aging facilities like Building 9212 and a whole list of safety concerns that are woefully ignored by National Nuclear Security Agency (NNSA) and contractors.

It is not an easy task to determine safety concerns when the process is complicated by rivalry between competing contractors and agencies, all the while the list of safety concerns grows unchecked.

And yet.

And yet, you are here today.

For that I am grateful and hopeful. Because yours is the responsibility to discern what really are the safety problems and challenges,

There is no arguing the fact that most shortcomings in security and safety at Y12 over the years, and most recently, the nonviolent, faithful action on July 28, 2010 by the Transform Now Plowshares peace activists Sr. Megan Rice, Greg Boertje-Obed, and Michael Walli who made pilgrimage over the ridge to the walls of the Highly-Enriched Uranium Manufacturing Facility (HEUMF) have centered on safety problems that the managers of Y12 themselves have created. One must beware of assumptive language of progress by the National Nuclear Security Agency (NNSA) and contractors fostering the fantasy that ever-increasingly we are safer.

The fortification of the planned UPF, for example, is lacking all semblance of safety: building above ground with minimal protection from external threats: a frighteningly real potential for catastrophic results. I believe that you, members of

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this Safety Board, must address the vulnerabilities of the UPF to attacks. Safety must be integrated into the design of the UPF from the beginning, not retro-fitted into plans lest we contaminate the future with forked-tongued promises of safety and security, all the while the UPF as designed now poses significant dangers to East Tennesseans and the remainder of humanity, as well as nonhuman life near and far.

Bold steps are needed now.

There has never been a time like this.

Our nation can carry great weight in influencing other nuclear weapons nations toward establishing the highest standards of safety by putting into practice the changes needed to guarantee safety here at Oak Ridge Y12 and at other Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear facilities.

I look to your efforts, in using the weight of your mission, to report to Congress wise steps that need to be taken immediately to assure safety at the Oak Ridge Y12 National Security Complex, including the UPF.

Thank you for listening. I commend to you OREPA's coordinator, Ralph Hutchison, to fill in, with expansive wisdom and much-needed insights, the vast gulfs of safety concerns I did not address. I am convinced that a dialogue with him would greatly benefit your work.

There has never been a time like this. Indeed!
Act boldly!

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