

Abraham Weitzberg: Santa Susana Field Lab: Health Risk Calls for a Fresh Look

Sep 26, 2015

Re: Dr. Robert Dodge's Sept. 6, 2015, guest column, "The shell game at Santa Susana Field Laboratory" published in the Ventura County Star http://www.vcstar.com/opinion/columnists/dr-robert-dodge-the-shell-game-at-the-santa-susana-field-laboratory_76071344

I am the petitioner Dr. Dodge mentioned, whom the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) was trying to protect from such personal attacks.

I have no connection to the Santa Susana Field Laboratory (SSFL) except for the fact that I worked there for three years, over 50 years ago. While I continue to consult part-time for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Department of Energy, all of my work is unrelated to SSFL.

Dr. Dodge's column presents misinformation with the sole purpose of trying to prevent an independent look at the health risk posed by the contamination now known to exist at SSFL.

He starts with the obligatory reference to the 1959 Sodium Reactor Experiment (SRE) accident, which is truly irrelevant to the current cleanup issue. The SRE facility was removed long ago and excavated to bedrock. EPA found very little radiological contamination and none that could be traced to the SRE accident.

He refers to the so-called "independent" SSFL advisory panel and studies they directed. These studies included epidemiological studies of workers and a small area in the vicinity of SSFL. These studies are irrelevant to the cleanup because the operational activities at the site have ceased and the only future workers will be those doing cleanup.

Additionally, Dr. Morgenstern concluded his off-site study with the words "There is no direct evidence from this investigation, however, that these observed associations reflect the effects of environmental exposures originating at SSFL." The pathway study by Yoram Cohen was acknowledged to be extremely conservative, and many questions were asked of Professor Cohen but none were answered. However, it also is irrelevant to the cleanup because the pathways from site operations no longer exist.

Dr. Dodge does not mention that all of these studies including those he cited relating to SRE were directed by Dan Hirsch, using researchers that he selected. Dan Hirsch is a well known anti-nuclear activist and anyone who has seen him in action can attest to the fact that he is neither unbiased nor independent.

In contrast, there are numerous other health studies that provide conclusions that differ from those of Drs. Morgenstern and Cohen. After studying all of the reports and seeing the differences, as can be seen in my petition, I attempted to create a panel discussion where all of the authors would come together in public and reach consensus.

In discussion with Dr. Cohen, the idea of petitioning ATSDR was born. It did not arise from some collusion between me and the responsible parties.

Before you accept Dr. Dodge's view of ATSDR, I suggest you look at the 1999 ATSDR report on SSFL. It is very detailed and concludes, "In this preliminary evaluation of available data and information, ATSDR has not identified an apparent public health hazard to the surrounding communities because people have not been, and are currently not being exposed to chemicals and radionuclides from the site at levels that are likely to result in adverse health effects."

Additionally, the state Department of Toxic Substances Control has repeated many times that there is no off-site risk from SSFL.

It is readily apparent that the only studies even suggesting the possibility of off-site health risk are those directed by Dan Hirsch. It is therefore not surprising that those who support Dan Hirsch do not want ATSDR to perform another study based on the current non-operational state with known concentrations of contaminants.

Abraham Weitzberg, of Woodland Hills, has a doctorate in nuclear engineering.