

BOOK REVIEWS

The Truth About Chernobyl

Rosalie Bertell, Ph.D.

Alexy V. Yablokov, Vassily B. Nesterenko, and Alexey V. Nesterenko, *Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment*, Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 1181, 2009.

This new publication of the Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences (Volume 1181), by Alexey Yablokov, Vassily Nesterenko, and Alexey Nesterenko, is the elucidation many of us have been waiting for since the 1986 disaster at the failed nuclear reactor in Ukraine. Until now we have read about the published reports of limited spotty investigations by Western scientists who undertook projects in the affected territories. Even the prestigious International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), World Health Organization (WHO), and United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) reports have been based on about 300 such Western research papers, leaving out the findings of some 30,000 scientific papers prepared by scientists working and living in the stricken territories and suffering the everyday problems of residential contamination with nuclear debris and a contaminated food supply.

Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment is written by Alexey Yablokov, Vassily Nesterenko, and Alexey Nesterenko. The senior author, Alexey Yablokov, was State Councilor for Environment and Health under President Yeltsin—since then he has received no support. Vassily Nesterenko, head of the Belarussian Nuclear establishment at the time of the accident, flew over the burning reactor and took the only measurements. In August 2008, he died as a result of radiation damage, but earlier, with help from Andrei Sakarov, he was able to establish the Belrad Institute to help children of the area.

The three scientists who assembled the information in the book from more than 5,000 published articles and research findings—mostly available only within the former Soviet Union or Eastern block countries and not accessible in the West—are prestigious scientists who present objective facts clearly nuanced with little or no polemics. They were not encumbered by a desire to promote or excessively blame a failed technology!

The book was expertly translated into readable English by Janette Sherman, Medical Toxicologist and Adjunct Professor in the Environmental Institute at Western Michigan University.

Professor Dr. of Biology, Dimitro Grodzinsky, Chair of the Department of Biology of the Ukraine National Academy of Sciences and member of the National Commission, wrote the Forward to the book. His statement relative to Western reporting of the accident is illuminating:

For a long time I have thought that the time has come to put an end to the opposition between technocracy advocates and those who support objective scientific efforts to estimate the negative risks for people exposed to the Chernobyl fallout. The basis for believing that these risks are not minor is very convincing.

The government of the former Soviet Union previously classified many documents now accessible to the authors. For example, we now know that the number of people hospitalized for acute radiation sickness was more than a hundred times larger than the number recently quoted by the IAEA, WHO and UNSCEAR. Unmentioned by the technocrats were the problems of “hot particles” of burning uranium that caused nasopharyngeal problems, and the radioactive fallout that resulted in the general deterioration of the health of children, widespread blood and lymph system diseases, reproductive loss, premature and small infant births, chromosomal mutations, congenital and developmental abnormalities, multiple endocrine diseases, mental disorders, and cancer.

The authors systematically explain the secrecy conditions imposed by the government, the failure of technocrats to collect data on the number and distribution of all of the radionuclides of major concern, and the restrictions placed on physicians against calling any medical findings radiation related unless the patient had been a certified “acute radiation sickness” patient during the disaster, thus assuring that only 1 percent of injuries would be so reported.

This book is a “must read” for all of those bureaucrats currently promoting nuclear power as the only “solution” for climate change. Those who seek information on the disaster only from the official documentation provided by the IAEA, WHO, and UNSCEAR need to broaden their reading to include the reality check from those scientists who have access to local findings and are simply telling the truth, with no hidden propaganda agenda.

I was impressed by the simple message of the cover of this volume, which shows a number of felled logs with clearly distinguishable colors of wood: before and after Chernobyl. The reader will find that the environment, living plants, and animals all suffered ill effects from this experience, as did the human population. *Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment* should be a sobering read for all those who have believed the fiction that “low doses of radiation are harmless,” or that a severe nuclear accident is easily contained within the human environment.