

URANIUM? In Virginia?

- Yes, Virginia. If two out-of-state corporations have their way, Virginia will become the first uranium-producing state east of the Mississippi River. Every eastern state other than Virginia which has considered the question has decided not to allow uranium production at this time.
- Using federal studies, private industry has discovered uranium in Virginia. Today more than 45,000 acres of Pittsylvania County land are under lease for uranium mining. As recently as September 1982, an additional 17,000 acres of land were under lease in the Northern Piedmont counties of Orange, Culpeper, Madison and Fauquier.
- Current proponents of a Virginia uranium industry say they have abandoned plans to develop the northern Piedmont deposit on the grounds that it is not commercially viable. Other studies suggest that the Northern Piedmont deposit may be as rich as the one in Pittsylvania County — and therefore may be of future interest to other companies if uranium mining is allowed in Virginia.
- Right now, uranium cannot be mined legally in Virginia. The 1982 General Assembly and Governor Robb decided that the dangers presented by uranium production to our public health and environment were too great to allow the industry to operate until studies were made to determine whether and under what circumstances Virginia should allow uranium mining. Those studies are due to be completed in 1984 by a state agency Task Force working with outside consultants.
- The only places where uranium is produced in the United States are in the west where the geology, climate and lower population density create a very different situation than ours here in Virginia. The uranium industry has an extremely poor environmental and public health history — serious accidents have happened out west — and experts have advised the General Assembly that the technology does not currently exist to allow safe uranium production in Virginia. Of course, others — especially those hired by the companies which want to mine here — have told our Senators and Delegates that uranium production will make a safe and positive contribution to our economy.
- Federal regulation of the uranium industry has been of debatable effectiveness in the west and has given only passing attention to the possibility of uranium mining in the wet, densely populated east. In May 1983 Governor Robb wrote to Mr. Ruckelshaus that the EPA's proposed uranium waste disposal regulations "will not adequately protect our citizens and our environment. . ." State officials are now proceeding on the assumption that if uranium production is allowed in Virginia it will be under regulations developed and enforced by the Commonwealth — and at the Commonwealth's expense.

What are the risks?

- Uranium production presents a serious threat to our water supplies. When rain falls on the waste products of the uranium milling process (generally called "mill tailings") the run-off picks up radioactive and other toxic elements which can wind up in the surface streams, rivers, and lakes. In addition, the considerable volume of water in the tailings at the time they are covered for "final" disposal will ultimately seep into the ground below and around the pile. If any of these things occurs, the resulting problems could be with us and remain dangerous to people, livestock, wildlife, and crops for more than 264,000 years. Virginia must not permit another ecological disaster like Kepone.
- Any type of mining operation can dramatically affect the local water table — often lowering it to the point that homeowners and business people must drill ever deeper wells to assure themselves of usable water. Uranium mining carries the additional risk of serious groundwater pollution. If uranium is mined in Virginia, you could find not only that less water is available to you but also that the water which you do have is radioactive or otherwise toxic.
- A Virginia state government official has stated that uranium production would increase Virginia's hazardous waste disposal problem "astronomically." For example, if the Pittsylvania County deposit is mined, 15 million tons of mill tailings will be produced in an area drained by streams which feed the Dan River and Kerr Reservoir. Under one industry disposal plan, the tailings would be mounded 100 feet high over 220 acres of land where the water table is only five feet below the surface.
- Radioactive and other toxic gases and particles will be washed and blown from the mill tailings unless they are protected from rain and wind for hundreds of thousands of years. No one has yet put forth a means of controlling the same types of pollution over the same period of time from open pit mines.

Who will decide?

- Uranium should now be counted as one of Virginia's many natural resources. We must, through our representatives in the General Assembly, decide whether and under what circumstances we will allow this particular natural resource to be developed.
- The question is to be presented to the General Assembly in January 1985. The legislature will be provided recommendations by a state agency Task Force created in January 1984 to study further the statewide implications of allowing or disallowing development of our uranium resources, but ultimately the decision is the responsibility of the full General Assembly.

What about the economy?

- Uranium industry officials are pressing hard for permission to mine and mill in our second most productive agricultural county. Each Virginian whose livelihood depends upon agricultural production should be deeply concerned about the effect that uranium mining could have on our air quality and water supply — and on the market for Virginia's agricultural products.
- Industry proponents now promise to employ 453 people in Virginia if they are allowed to mine and mill here. (In mid-1982 the projections were for 900 jobs.) The 453 jobs to be created, though described as "permanent" by industry proponents, will actually end after 13 years when the deposit in question is "mined out" and the facility shut down. Moreover, company figures indicate that during operations most employees will be paid substantially less than the \$16,410 average manufacturing wage for the area and less than the \$14,752 average wage for all jobs in the area.
- The area proposed for Virginia's first uranium mine has been generating more than 500 jobs per year for the past ten years, yet the industry's October 1983 report estimates that this rate of job creation will drop to less than 200 by 1990. Why? Will uranium mining discourage other more desirable economic development?

Who will bear the costs?

- Local governments have been promised vastly increased local revenues, with the industry proponents speaking publicly about building a \$200 million dollar facility in Virginia. In their October 1983 report to the state, however, they pegged the base value of the facility for tax purposes at \$70 million. Even this lower figure exceeds the federal Department of Energy's estimate of capital expenditures for the entire U.S. uranium industry in all of 1984.
- We don't know what the state income tax revenues will be from a specific uranium operation, but we know they'll probably be less than the industry's proponents are promising. According to figures in their own report, the proposed Pittsylvania County facility, for example, would have to operate for twenty more days than there are in a year in order to generate the promised state revenues. Not only is this impossible but few western facilities have managed to stay open for as much as six months per year in the severely depressed uranium market of recent years.
- The uranium proponents' report does not include other important costs which Virginians must consider: the cost of public health and environmental regulation, monitoring and enforcement; post-closure maintenance of the tailings pile(s) and abandoned mine(s), losses of property tax revenues from the facility site(s) (which would have to be per-

manently deeded over to the state or federal government) and from depressed land values surrounding the site(s), and increased health costs and lost productivity within the local population(s) as a result of the operation(s).

- Also left unanswered are such basic questions as: If a community water supply is damaged by uranium operations, who will pay to replace it? Will the Commonwealth guarantee such protection to local governments?
- So far as we have been able to determine, there is no insurance available to protect your property against damage caused by radiation. Check with your insurance agent. Home and business owners in other parts of the U.S. have found after the fact that they were not covered for radiation damage to their property.

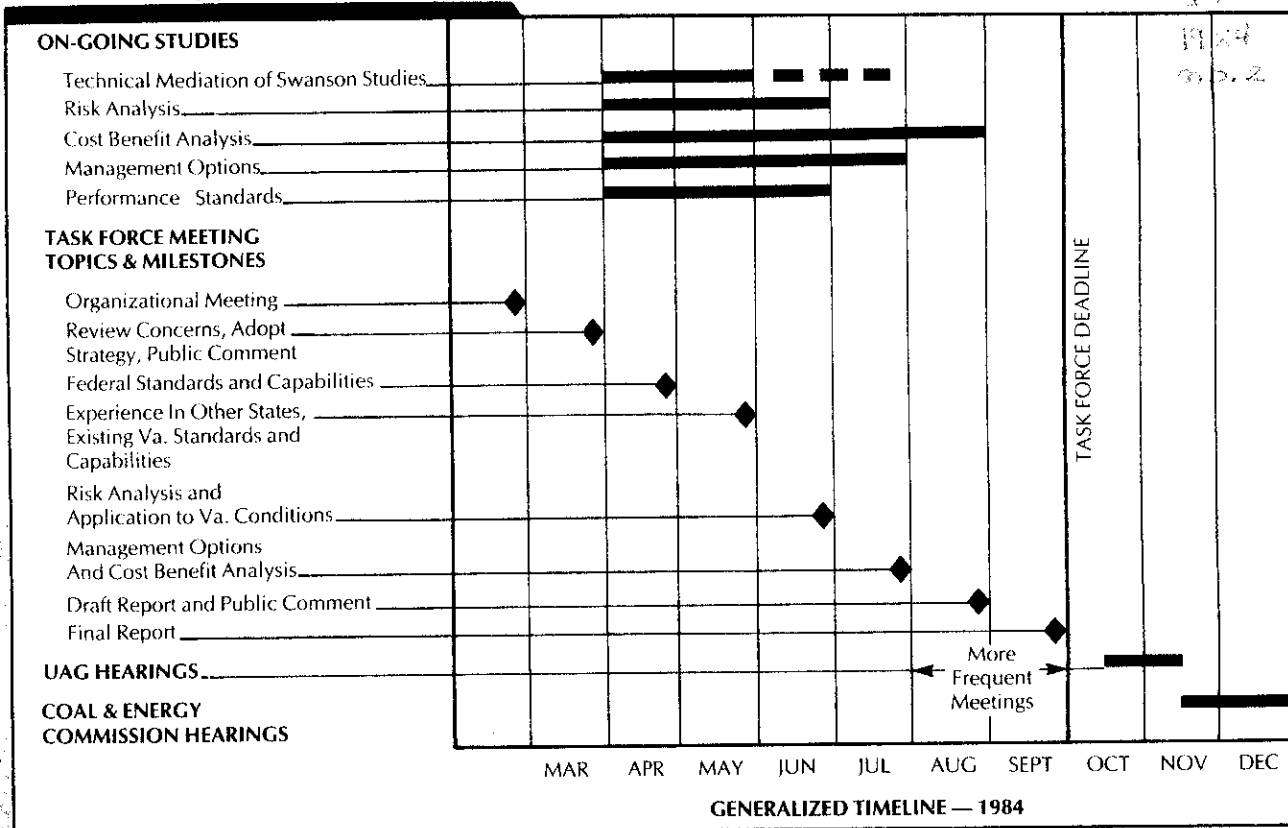
What's the rush?

- There is none. The federal (NURE) study which identified "speculative" uranium reserves in Virginia also noted that "there are sufficient domestic resources at (a moderate) cost level to meet fuel requirements for currently projected long-term nuclear power demand through 2020." And that projection was made in 1980, before the recent wave of nuclear power plant cancellations.
- By the industry proponents' own estimate, the proposed Pittsylvania County uranium operation would be shut down (because the deposit had been exhausted) within 13 years of start-up. The Commonwealth has and should take all the time it needs to determine the desirability of allowing such an operation. If the ultimate decision is to go ahead, there will be plenty of time to get Virginia uranium into the market place.

What can you do?

- You can:
 1. Let your elected representatives know that you do not want uranium production in Virginia until we know it can be done safely and measures have been taken to protect you, your job and your property if anything goes wrong.
 2. Contact the Piedmont Environmental Council to get further information on the issues involved in allowing or not allowing uranium production in Virginia.
 3. Work within your community to inform others of the uranium threat to Virginia's economy, public health and natural resources; and
 4. Urge your business association, local civic group, parent-teachers association, and church to hold an educational meeting on the wisdom of allowing uranium production in Virginia at this time.

What's happening when?



EPA says . . .

"The radioactivity and toxic materials in tailings may cause cancer and other diseases, as well as genetic damage and teratogenic effects."

"...the radiation hazard from tailings lasts for many hundreds of thousands of years, and some nonradioactive toxic chemicals persist indefinitely."

"...in addition to radionuclides, nonradioactive toxic substances . . . can be leached from tailings and contaminate water. Such contamination could affect crops, animals and people."

VIRGINIA STATE LIBRARY
RICHMOND

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1983

The Piedmont Environmental Council has been studying uranium production and its possible effects on Virginia's environment, public health and economy for more than three years. We have a booklet, slide show, speaker's bureau and a library of information which will help you become better informed on this important issue.

This work has been expensive. Our members have paid for the bulk of our research and educational work with their annual dues and special gifts. Please join us. If you become a member (\$15/year), you will receive our monthly newsletter, which will keep you abreast of our uranium work as well as our other important projects. If you can, please make a special gift in addition to your dues to assure our continued uranium education work.

All contributions are tax-deductible.

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