

# COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN  
NUCLEAR DANGERS & A SAFE,  
SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

## Winter 2018 Newsletter

- 1 Hunters Point Shipyard
- 3 Toxic Santa Susana Burns
- 4 SSFL - A Mother's Story
- 5 San Onofre Update
- 6 A New Generation
- 6 Message from Executive Coordinator

# HUNTERS POINT SHIPYARD

## The Nuclear Arms Race Comes Home

by Taylor Altenbern,  
CBG Research Associate

THE HUNTERS POINT Shipyard (HPS), located on the southeast tip of San Francisco, has been entrenched in nuclear activity from the very dawn of the atomic era. The day the “Trinity” atomic bomb was detonated on July 16, 1945, the USS Indianapolis departed from HPS and sailed to Tinian Island, carrying with it half the global supply of highly enriched uranium and other components of the “Little Boy” atomic bomb. On August 6th, the assembled bomb was loaded onto the Enola Gay and dropped on Hiroshima.

A year after the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the first post-war nuclear tests, called Operation Crossroads, were conducted in the Bikini Atoll in the Pacific. 240 target and support ships circled the epicenters of the nuclear tests, both of which went badly awry. Severe and unanticipated contamination of the vessels resulted. Twelve sank immediately, many were mangled and rendered unusable, while those remaining were intensely coated with radioactivity. After multiple efforts to decontaminate the ships at sea failed, HPS, in a predominantly minority and low-income community, was selected as the location where the most heavily contaminated of them would be taken to be “cleaned.” It was then that problems from the nuclear arms race, once seem-



Operation Crossroads, 1946. Note ships beneath the mushroom cloud. NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHIVE

ingly restricted to remote areas of the Pacific, silently were brought to San Francisco.

The Navy’s attempts to “decontaminate” the irradiated ships included sandblasting and steam cleaning, methods which merely moved the contamination from the ships to Hunters Point itself. This careless process, along with numerous other sloppy operations—including a secret laboratory that conducted countless tests involving radioactive elements—resulted in the release of dozens of radionuclides, often in large quantities, across the site. It wasn’t until decades later that HPS was acknowledged by the EPA as one of the most contaminated sites in the nation and designated a Superfund site in 1989. Unfortunately, the troubles quietly multiplied as the cleanup process unfolded.

*continued on page 2*

## HUNTERS POINT - CONTINUED

Following Superfund designation, the Navy hired Tetra Tech to conduct soil testing and cleanup. After decades of work and millions of dollars spent, the cleanup came under a cloud when whistleblowers disclosed that soil tests and data were routinely falsified. The EPA has concluded that measurements at 90-97% of the survey units appear to be fabricated. Now, after two criminal convictions, three lawsuits, and a slew of troubling revelations, there is essentially no trustworthy data to support presumptions of safety at HPS. While the Tetra Tech scandal has brought the shipyard to the attention of the media and has activated community involvement, there are many more fractured elements of the cleanup that have, until recently, been kept under wraps.

The interest circulating around the HPS cleanup is largely centered on the Tetra Tech scandal, but the startling falsifications are just the tip of the iceberg. Three years of research, beginning at the University of California Santa Cruz and continued through Committee to Bridge the Gap, have culminated to date in three extensive reports, each of which uncovered faults embedded in the HPS cleanup.

The first report details the extraordinary radiological history of HPS, which the Navy largely neglected or diminished when determining the extent of the cleanup required. Indeed, despite all 883 sites at HPS having the likelihood of contamination, the Navy claimed only 91 as potentially impacted and therefore to be considered for testing. The remaining



*Satellite Photo of Hunters Point*

90% were arbitrarily declared to be free of contamination, largely based on fragmentary information compiled from incomplete records. Parcel A, the portion of HPS that currently houses hundreds of residents, was one of the many areas declared clean without any thorough testing. Years later, spurred by the Tetra Tech scandal and the request of residents, a partial gamma scan was performed by the California Department of Health. Despite using instruments with extremely poor detection capability, the scan found a highly radioactive source, where no radioactivity was supposed to be possible, undermining claims by the Navy that the land is clean.

The small portion of the site that did receive testing, albeit manipulated, was also riddled with shortcomings that prevent the site from being adequately cleaned up. CBG's second report examines a myriad of problems that transcend a single contractor's apparent malpractice. Astonishingly, 90% of the dozens of radionuclides that were used at HPS were excluded from the cleanup. Therefore, no cleanup

standards were established for them, meaning they can exist at unlimited levels of contamination without being remediated. Another startling practice examined in the second report which began with Tetra Tech but has continued to date is the use of background measurements from within the contaminated Superfund site itself. Background measurements are meant to establish values for radionuclides which represent levels that would be present prior to any polluting activity. However, what has occurred at HPS is to inflate these values so that what is actually dirty can be called clean, and subsequently left in the soil or on the buildings.

The cleanup levels that are established for each contaminant greatly determine the overall comprehensiveness of the cleanup. As was examined in depth in the third report, the standards that were used and continue to be used at HPS are grossly outdated and far less protective than what was initially promised. Radium-226, for example, the most ubiquitously recognized radionuclide across the site,

*continued on page 7*

971 X more  
Plutonium-239

897 X more  
Radium-226

421 X more  
Thorium-232

EPA  
Cleanup  
Levels

**Navy Cleanup Levels Allow 100s X MORE Contamination Than EPA Goals**

# TOXIC SANTA SUSANA BURNS

By Dan Hirsch, CBG President

**In 2000 Bridge the Gap's then-Sacramento Director Bill Magavern and I wrote then-governor Davis, warning of a "dangerous situation, which the state's regulatory agencies do not seem to be addressing – the potential for radioactively and chemically contaminated sites to catch fire, releasing their toxic materials." We particularly called attention to the risks that fire might devastate the Santa Susana Field lab (SSFL) before its contamination had been cleaned up.**

Nearly two decades have passed, cleanup of SSFL still hasn't even begun, and on November 8 our fears were realized when the contaminated site ignited in the devastating Woolsey Fire, which eventually spread all the way to the ocean, consuming 100,000 acres. Initial news reports said the fire began "near" SSFL. However, CBG was able to demonstrate that in fact the fire started on SSFL, close to the site of the 1959 partial nuclear meltdown that CBG had first disclosed nearly forty years ago.

Southern California Edison meekly informed state regulators that its "Chatsworth Electrical

Substation" had experienced a "relay" two minutes before the fire was reported. The media assumed the substation was in Chatsworth, but we were able to demonstrate quickly that it was in fact on SSFL, and just a few hundred yards from where the fire started. Indeed, the substation had been built in part to service the SRE nuclear reactor that later suffered a meltdown. Now, sixty years later, ironically, that same substation may be associated with a devastating fire at the site still drenched in contamination from decades past.

The same entities responsible for the contamination, and for not cleaning it up, have tried to defend

their failures by claiming no toxic or radioactive material was released by the fire.

However, about half of SSFL burned, much of it contaminated. Plants growing in polluted soil absorb pollutants. When that vegetation growing in contaminated soil burns, radioactive and toxic chemicals in the plants and in the soil can be released and carried substantial distances offsite in the smoke, exposing people.

The risks from radioactive and chemical contamination being released in the fire would not have been a concern had the cleanup commitments by those responsible for the pollution and their regulators been honored. In 2007 and 2010, legally binding agreements were executed requiring cleanup to be completed by 2017. We are now in 2018, and the cleanup not only hasn't been concluded, it hasn't even begun. Furthermore, there are efforts underway to exempt 90% or more of the contami-

nation from any cleanup that may eventually occur.

In 2010, we noted that we had asked officials of the state toxics agency "whether, in setting cleanup levels for the contamination, they considered the potential for a fire in which contaminants in vegetation and soil are lofted into the air. They said no, and asserted that there was no need for such consideration because such a fire was completely 'speculative' and non-credible." What has turned out to be non-credible are the assertions by the toxics agency, and the promises it and the SSFL polluters have made.

Bridge the Gap has tried to help the communities impacted by SSFL for nearly forty years. The Trump Administration appears intent on breaking the federal commitments to site cleanup. The deeply dysfunctional state toxics agency has similarly been breaching its cleanup promises. The struggle to get the site cleaned up now will be in the hands of a new Governor. We will be working hard, continuing our forty-year-effort to get the people living in the area around SSFL finally protected.



*Start of Woolsey Fire  
Source: Stu Mundel KCBSKCAL Twitter post 11/8/18*



*Location of the Fire on SSFL, near Chatsworth Substation and SRE Partial Meltdown Site*



## SSFL – A MOTHER’S STORY

By Melissa Bumstead

**I first heard of the Santa Susana Field Lab when Grace was diagnosed with an aggressive form of leukemia in early 2014 at age four. A family member sent me paperwork on it. I didn't read past the headline before throwing the article in the trash - we live less than five miles from the site. To think I somehow contributed to Grace getting cancer by living near a toxic site was too painful to deal with it at the time.**

Six months after Grace was diagnosed, she and I were walking the halls at Children's Hospital during an inpatient stay. A mom opened her door and stuck her head out. "I know you two," she said. "You and your kids were at the park before my daughter was diagnosed. I recognize your daughter because she was bald. My daughter has neuroblastoma cancer now." "I'm sorry, but that's impossible," I said. "Childhood cancer is really rare. I don't think it's possible that we could live so close to each other."

Later I went home and looked up pictures I had taken on that day at the park. Julia and her daughter Bailey were in the background of all of them. I figured it was unlikely, but possible, that they could live that close—after all, we're in a populated

area. Bailey died in the arms of her daddy eleven months after being diagnosed with neuroblastoma cancer. She was two years old.

"Yes, my son has an eye-brain cancer, we used to live right near you when he was diagnosed," another mom said when she was commenting on the "Childhood Cancer Awareness" decorations on our car. "Our neighbor's daughter was nineteen," she said, "and had the same cancer my son did, the same year too. She died from it." I asked where they had lived. They lived on my street.

That same month, September 2015, I heard that the Santa Susana Field Lab was hosting a community forum where they would tell us if the site was toxic. The Department of Energy spokesperson told us that there was no elevated cancer

risk to the community. It wasn't until months later that I discovered the DOE Staff had lied to us. There were plenty of government-funded studies that showed elevated cancer risks in our community, and they knew it.

A year later I was informed by a trusted SSFL advocate that the Department of Energy was trying to get out of its 2010 promise to clean the site and that we had only weeks to let the community know about the situation if there was any hope of a cleanup.

I started reaching out to other cancer parents I knew. They helped me find more kids in our community with cancer. With the help of a good friend who is a statistician, we started to do the math with all the new kids we now had on our map. Using imputed data, we discovered it is very likely we are over the national averages for Rhabdomyosarcoma, Ewing Sarcoma, and Optic Pathway

Hypothalamic Glioma (eye-brain) cancer.

I found children with absurdly rare cancers, all within 20 miles of the SSFL, even in the rare world of childhood cancer. Ewings Sarcoma has about 200 cases out of 73,941,848 children in America. We had two teens, from the same high school, the same year diagnosed with that disease last year. 2 out of 200. That's 1% of America's population at the same high school in West Hills. To be clear, the West Hills is not 1% of America's population. It's 0.01%.

The Optic Pathway Hypothalamic Glioma (eye-brain) cancer has 25 cases in America. That's 25 kids out of 74,000,000 kids. And we had two of them on the same street, the same year. 10% of America's children with this rare eye-brain cancer were living on my street. And the list goes on.

How can we look at these

*continued on page 7*



*Melissa Bumstead hands SSFL petition with 360,000 signatures to Rhys Williams, Lieutenant Governor Newsom's Chief of Staff. Dr. Jimmy Hara of Physicians for Social Responsibility, at left.*

# SAN ONOFRE UPDATE: Nuclear Waste on the Beach?



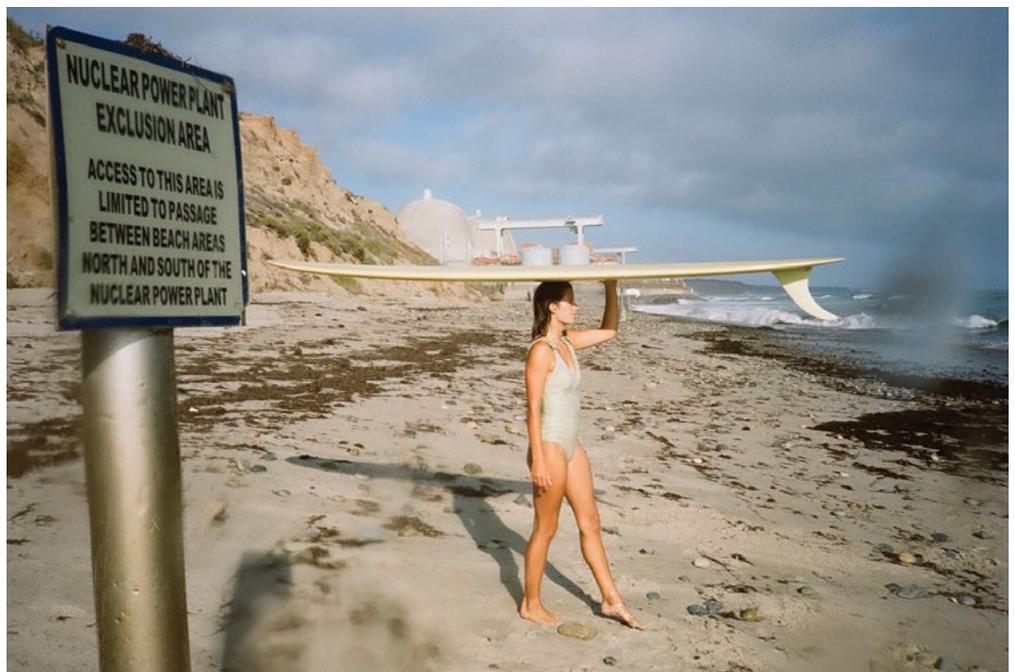
*Dry Cask Storage system being put in place adjacent to the beach at SONGS*

THE SAN ONOFRE NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION (SONGS) in North County San Diego shut down in 2012 after a steam generator failure resulted in a radioactive leak. The Committee to Bridge the Gap played a key role in disclosing fundamental underlying safety problems that ultimately led to the permanent closure of the plant in 2013.

Because no national repository for high level nuclear waste yet exists, SONGS has been storing its high-level radioactive waste on-site in the interim. Its plan is to move all the irradiated fuel to outdoor dry casks just 100 feet from the ocean and a few feet above the water table. CBG and concerned community members fear that the waste could be there for a very long time, and with sea level rise and vulnerability to terrorist attack as major concerns, are advocating for the waste to be relocated to a new, atmospherically controlled temporary storage building on higher ground east of the plant on Camp Pendleton where it could be better protected.

This summer CBG hired Sarah Brady as lead Environmental Research Associate and Community Organizer on the San Onofre project. Sarah was a student in Dan Hirsch's Environmental Policy class at UC Santa Cruz in 2017 and continued to research SONGS after the class was over. As a transfer senior at UC San Diego she works on the San Onofre project locally and reports back to CBG headquarters in Santa Cruz. Sarah is also a surfer from North County San Diego whose family has deep roots in the San Onofre Surfing Club, which dates back to the 1950's. Since she started with us in June, Sarah has spoken for CBG at multiple Community Engagement Panel meetings, worked on two mini documentaries about SONGS, helped organize a local event to raise awareness, and run two social media campaigns about SONGS. She is also working with others at CBG on an in-depth study of irradiated fuel issues at San Onofre and potential solutions.

CBG submitted detailed comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) on Decommissioning SONGS over the summer. Sarah created a special webpage through which members of the public could submit official comments on the DEIR and ran a social media campaign that went viral in the surf community and which resulted in the submission of 5,364 comments on the draft EIR in just one week. The California State Lands Commission's decision on the EIR is due next year. CBG will continue to advocate for a sensible and ethical solution to the insidious dilemma of storing nuclear waste.



*CBG Environmental Research Associate Sarah Brady still surfs near San Onofre*

## A Message from Catherine Lincoln, Executive Coordinator



I FIRST BEGAN WORKING with Dan Hirsch and the Committee to Bridge the Gap in 1990 during the fight over the proposed Ward

Valley Nuclear Waste Dump, which endangered the nearby Colorado River, the primary water source for much of the Southwest. It took over 11 years, but the battle was eventually won, in large part due to CBG's research and disclosures. I wish that all such struggles could be resolved as promptly!

In 2007, I joined CBG as the Annual Report/Newsletter editor and shortly thereafter became the Executive Coordinator. This gave me an inside look at CBG's deep commitment to protecting the world and future generations from nuclear threats. While CBG is small, it is indeed mighty in accomplishments. CBG's research contributed

to the decision to close the dangerous Santa Susana Field Lab (SSFL) and the San Onofre nuclear plant, and the phase-out of Diablo Canyon in California. Nationally and internationally, CBG has been instrumental in the successful effort to ban the dumping of nuclear waste in the oceans, the elimination of the use of weapons-grade uranium in reactors, and the adoption by the NRC of regulations requiring nuclear power plants be protected against truck bombs.

Although this is the first time Hunters Point has been introduced in the newsletter, CBG has been hard at work for over three years, doing the research and laying the groundwork for three major reports on the radioactive contamination and the Navy's botched cleanup. I urge you to visit [committeetobridgethegap.org](http://committeetobridgethegap.org) and take some time to peruse the Hunters Point

reports and the Hunter's Point Community Presentation prepared by Dan Hirsch, CBG's growing staff and an expanding cadre of interns. It is impressive work.

The fight for justice is often unbalanced in terms of resources, but people of conscience can prevail against the forces that damage the planet. CBG's work training a new generation committed to environmental protection and working to prevent the deadly growth of nuclear risks means that your donation will be turned directly into positive change. So please give what you can.

**For almost 50 years, your tax-deductible contributions have miraculously sustained our work. Your support remains crucial to CBG's important work in these increasingly dangerous times. Thank you.**

## A NEW GENERATION: CBG EXPANDS STAFF & INTERN PROGRAM

Bridge the Gap has made a major effort to bring in a new generation, who are contributing important new energy and vision to the work while at the same time developing skills that will hopefully be useful for years to come. The number of young CBG staffers and interns has grown dramatically. Research Associates include Maria Caine, Taylor Altenbern, Haakon Williams, and Sarah Brady. After several years with us, Devyn Gortner has recently moved to Oregon and Mikey Rincon to a position at our sister organization Physicians for Social Responsibility. Julian Honey and Liane Bauer are in Washington DC and Sacramento respectively for the fall, to return soon. Interns this year include Faylenn McDonough, Lauren DiQuattro, Daniela Aguilar, Candice Benhamou, Dezi Bunio, Audrey Ford, Alhad Dighe, Bridget Thorpe, Cori Strell, Christian Soriano, Echo Vanier, Heather Hanson, Paige Pearson and Sophie Chertok. A few of them are pictured below. They have made immense contributions to work on Hunters Point, Santa Susana Field Lab, San Onofre and numerous other projects. It is clear that the experience gained by working with CBG is vital to the development of the environmental guardians of the future. Staffer Haakon Williams puts it well:

"I graduated from UC Santa Cruz in 2016 with a double major in Environmental Studies and Philosophy. I am

interested in issues of public accessibility of knowledge and institutional hypocrisy, and am building skills in research, writing, and media relations, so Committee to Bridge the Gap couldn't have come into my life at a better moment. Working with Dan is very inspirational, because his formidable expertise is grounded in deep empathy and a holistic eye. In these troubled times, CBG is right where I want to be: working with a community of committed folks to find the dirt, rake the muck, and take one more step toward the world we want."



*Pictured are just a few of CBG's team: left to right, standing, Haakon Williams (staff), and interns Faylenn McDonough, Lauren DiQuattro, Daniela Aguilar, and Candice Benhamou, left to right, kneeling, Dezi Bunio and Audrey Ford*



CBG President, Dan Hirsch was interviewed by NBC Bay Area's Investigative Unit following the release of the Hunters Point Reports.

### HUNTERS POINT - CONTINUED

is given a cleanup standard by the Navy that is 897 times weaker than EPA's Preliminary Remediation Goal (PRG). Using EPA's PRG Calculators, we were able to show that the ancient standards the Navy has been using at HPS are hundreds or thousands of times weaker than current EPA PRGs, with resultant cancer risks as high, for buildings, as every 37<sup>th</sup> person predicted to get a cancer if exposed at the allowable levels. Virtually the entire radioactive cleanup of HPS has been in violation of the elementary requirement to use up-to-date EPA standards, violating Superfund law and undercutting public safety, but reducing Navy cleanup costs.

We presented the findings of our first two reports directly to the Hunters Point community, resulting in coverage on half a dozen tele-

vision news broadcasts. Our third report was front page news in the San Francisco Chronicle and covered by numerous other outlets.

The host of flaws present in the cleanup at HPS persist beyond Tetra Tech's work. Indeed, the recent retesting which has occurred or is planned to occur in various areas across the site adopt similar troubled practices to those by Tetra Tech that triggered the need for retesting in the first place. The shortcomings in the remediation process are thus indicative of a larger problem of lackadaisical oversight by the regulating agencies. CBG will continue to attempt to help this impacted community by illuminating the shortcomings of the HPS cleanup process, highlighting potential dangers to public health and the environment, and stress the need for reform of agency oversight.

For access to all three CBG Hunters Point reports, the extensive news coverage that followed their release and CBG's Hunters Point Community Presentation, go to: [committeetobridgethegap.org](http://committeetobridgethegap.org) Click on issues, then select Hunters Point.

### A MOTHER'S STORY - CONTINUED

numbers and keep assuming it's a coincidence?

I have attended many more meetings about the SSFL, hoping to educate myself, because there are days when denial is so tempting. When I learned plutonium is on site, that is one hard fact that brings me back to the reality that this isn't something I'm making up. This isn't scare tactics.

And that is only one of the many dangerous contaminants I've been learning about that will stay permanently in our hills unless we demand the full clean up. I've learned that there has been a lot of deception to the community. And I say this as a person who doesn't like drama and hates confrontation. The Department of Energy, NASA and Boeing (who are the responsible parties for the contamination) continue to claim that nothing has migrated offsite and that the site is safe, but this is a blatant lie.

We assumed if the area were dangerous no one would let us live here. But we do live here. It's dangerous. And we are given the unfair burden to fight for a full cleanup, instead of trusting the polluters to do the right thing without

enforcement.

Then I think of my daughter Grace, that she was addicted at four years old to the morphine given to manage the pain from her chemo...and I can't. I can't be in denial anymore. No child should suffer cancer, and no parents should suffer the death of their child. Not when we can stop it-and we can by demanding a full clean up of the Santa Susana Field Lab, as we were promised.

For more information visit my website: [www.parentsassainstssfl.com](http://www.parentsassainstssfl.com) Please take a moment to sign our Change.org petition at: <https://www.change.org/p/no-more-kids-with-cancer-clean-up-the-santa-susana-field-lab/u/23572664> Before the election we provided both candidates for Governor copies of the petition. We've now gathered 525,000 signatures and counting!

*Note: As this newsletter goes to the printer, we learned that Melissa's daughter Grace, now 8, who relapsed last year and underwent a painful bone marrow transplant, has just been given confirmation that the transplant was 100% successful. Grace is cancer free.*

## CBG NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT

Your generous donations make this vital work possible.

Please send a donation or give online at [www.committeetobridgethegap.org](http://www.committeetobridgethegap.org)

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**COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP**

PO Box 4  
Ben Lomond, CA 95005-0004  
(831) 336-8003  
[www.committeetobridgethegap.org](http://www.committeetobridgethegap.org)

Daniel Hirsch, *President*  
Catherine Lincoln, *Executive Coordinator, Newsletter Editor*  
Anthony Zepeda, *Webmaster*  
Joel Hirsch, *Nuclear Terrorism Project*  
Laura Giges, *Bookkeeper*  
Megan Garrett, *Newsletter & Graphic Design*

**RESEARCH ASSOCIATES:** Taylor Altenbern, Liane Bauer,  
Sarah Brady, Maria Caine, Devyn Gortner, Julian Honey,  
Michael Rincon, Haakon Williams

**INTERNS:** Daniela Aguilar, Candice Benhamou, Dezi Bunio,  
Sophie Chertok, Alhad Dighe, Lauren DiQuattro, Audrey  
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