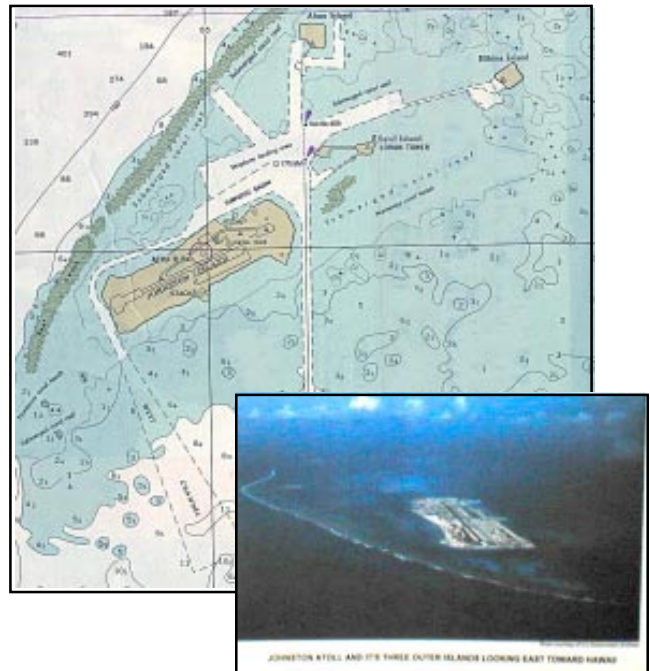


Are Government Agencies Making Plans in Our Best Interests??

“PUBLIC MEETINGS” Plutonium Cleanup on Johnston Atoll Hawai`i, May 2001

In-A-Nutshell

Johnston Atoll has been extensively contaminated with plutonium for nearly forty years because of failed nuclear tests conducted there in 1962. In July 2000, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) conducted a public meeting in Honolulu at Farrington High School to present survey activities that documented the extent of the contamination. To many public participants, the research presented was insufficient. Many questioned why the public meeting was announced *only the day before* and why Honolulu was the *only place in the country* where a public meeting would take place. DTRA officials said they would return in September 2000 for a second public meeting when they would provide plans for clean-up activities, yet no meeting took place. DTRA recently informed Rep. Patsy Mink that they will return for public meetings at the end of May 2001 in Hilo, Honolulu, Kahalui, and Lihue. Because there has been so little opportunity to give public input in addressing plutonium clean-up at Johnston, it is extremely important that people in Hawai`i speak up for the rest of the country, the rest of the world— to ensure U.S. plans for Johnston will effectively take into consideration the long-term dangers of plutonium and other environmental contaminants.



Locating Johnston

Johnston Atoll, long known in Hawai`i as Kalama, sits approximately 717 nautical miles west/southwest from O`ahu. In 1940, Johnston consisted of one island with a land mass 60 acres in size surrounded by its reefs and waters.

Scoping Sessions/“Open House”

May 21 Lihue Public Library, 5-8pm

May 22 Kahalui Public Library, 5-8pm

May 23 Hilo Public Library, 4-7pm

Scoping Session & Presentation

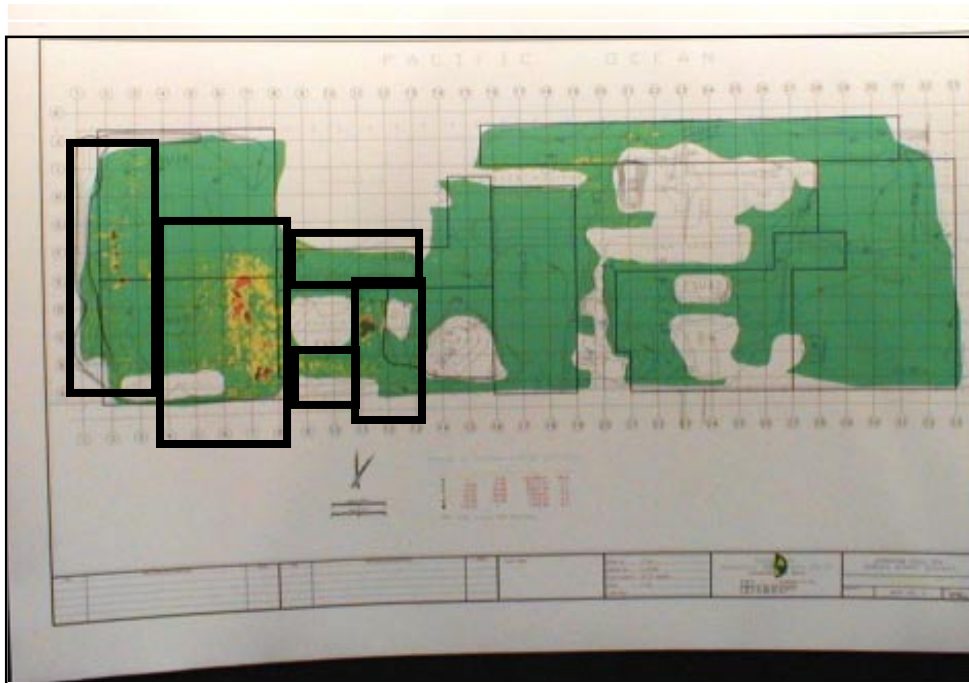
May 24 Honolulu Washington Middle School

Scoping Session, 6-7pm

Presentation & Questions, 7:30-9:30pm

For more specific details, call Mr. Stumpf of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency at (703) 325-7174.

Plutonium Contamination on Johnston Atoll



from DTRA, 7/2000

WHITE AREAS WITHIN THE GREEN =

parts of island that were not included in surface terrestrial surveys

AREAS IN BLACK BOXES =

parts of island where extensive plutonium contamination was found on the surface

U.S. Claims to and Use of Johnston Atoll

The U.S. government considered Johnston Atoll “uninhabited” upon claiming it in 1858 and subsequently annexed the island in 1898 when it also “acquired” control of the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, and Hawai`i. In the first part of the 20th century, Johnston was designated as a U.S. wildlife refuge because of its unique environment for sea birds and marine life. Following World War II and fueled by Cold War escalation, the U.S. government conducted at least 67 atomic and nuclear tests in the Pacific. Two of the nuclear tests exploded at Johnston Atoll failed and were aborted in 1962 — although nuclear detonation of the warheads was averted, the blasts tore both

weapons apart causing extensive plutonium contamination of the atoll and surrounding reefs.

During the war with Vietnam, Johnston like other Pacific Islands under U.S. administration was used intensively for airforce operations. Johnston has also served as a major storage site for agent orange, chemical and nuclear weapons. In the past decade, Johnston Atoll served as a primary facility for incinerating chemical weapons. Today, chemical weapon incineration is nearly complete, and the U.S. plans a new phase of cleaning up the highly dangerous levels of plutonium contamination that resulted from the 1962 failed tests.

THIS IS THE TIME TO MAKE SURE THAT:

- 1) U.S. officials will be accountable to the people the government represents and invite public participation in developing plans for plutonium cleanup at Johnston;***
 - 2) clean-up efforts will take place in a way that will protect people, wildlife, and the environment from further danger of the existing contamination;***
 - 3) U.S. officials develop and implement the most effective plans to address extensive environmental contamination, including plutonium contamination, driven by an understanding of long-term effects.***
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Extensive Plutonium Contamination at Johnston

Government sources identify plutonium as the most toxic substance known. It emits a kind of radiation that means direct contact with it, particularly by inhaling it or ingesting it, is deadly even in amounts as small as a speck of dust. The dangers of plutonium diminish very slowly over time—it takes over 20,000 years for plutonium to reach a level of half its original toxicity which means it will take over 85,000 years for the highest levels of plutonium contamination on Johnston to become “safe” according to current EPA guidelines. The first failed test took place at 30,000 feet over Johnston which meant that plutonium was scattered over a large area. The second never made it off the launch pad; this failure caused extreme plutonium contamination to buildings, equipment, and soil immediately surrounding the launch site. Of course, effects of plutonium contamination on Johnston cannot be examined as isolated from any other environmental contaminants from past military activities including PCBs, agent orange, and chemicals from chemical weapons.

Previous Clean-Up Activities

U.S. officials report multiple “clean-up” activities to address the extensive plutonium contamination combined with various construction projects in years following the failed tests. One strategy used was to simply cover up contaminated areas. This resulted in whole areas of the island being covered by mounds of coral at least 10 feet high that was

dredged from surrounding reefs. Dredged coral was also used to expand the size of the islands. In 1962, the U.S. had already “grown” the islands to 220 acres; by 1964, Johnston comprised 625 acres. Redistributing coral around the islands resulted in compounding contamination problems: some contaminated land materials were moved into the lagoon for construction and expansion, and tons of dredged coral most likely contaminated from the first failed test was brought onto land to cover the areas that had been most highly contaminated.

Current Efforts & Plans

Current U.S. activities to address extensive plutonium contamination point to the lack of success in previous efforts. As reported in the July 2000 public meeting in Honolulu, survey activities have remained very limited. The process of environmental assessment and public involvement being used does not follow National Environmental Protection Agency guidelines. Despite these shortcomings, government officials at that public meeting projected a future of “unrestricted use” and spoke of “settlers” and “ecotourists” on Johnston Atoll.

Some Questions to Ask

Why has the U.S. government limited radiological survey to only surface contamination instead of also including contamination beneath the surface of the islands?

Has sufficient research been conducted to study effects of plutonium contamination on birds, seals, fish, and coral on and around Johnston?

Why are there still large areas of Johnston Atoll, including areas that are contiguous with the most highly contaminated sites, that have not been surveyed for contamination?

Why do government officials identify a future of “unrestricted use” for Johnston Atoll when soil disturbances (such as caused by tropical storms and human activities of building and planting) can easily unearth deadly amounts of plutonium for residents and wildlife?

Why have government officials claimed that plutonium cleanup efforts at Johnston do not have to comply with the same EPA requirements that other public and private projects have to follow?

Why have government officials claimed that an Environmental Impact Statement (that includes a full process of public participation and opportunities for independent research) is not necessary?

Why did government officials fail to give advance notice for the public meeting regarding Johnston in July 2000 and why was Honolulu the only city in the country where a public meeting concerning these issues took place?

Why did government officials postpone this second public meeting from September 2000 to May 2001, why will they give only one presentation in the state (Honolulu), and, did they give appropriate advanced notice this time?

Lynn Wilson compiled the above information largely from the July 2000 meeting and government reports to provide public education and to encourage public participation in government decisions regarding the future of Johnston Atoll, the Pacific, our world. If you have questions or comments on this information, please contact Lynn at <webfish@hula.net>. Also contact American Friends Service Committee in Honolulu at (808) 988-6266. Mahalo.

Please feel free to copy and distribute this information to as many people as possible.