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You will be attending (or interested in) a workshop meeting to be held next week, 19 March 2003, in Rosemont, Illinois, on the subject of SPENT FUEL TRANSPORTATION CASK TESTING PROTOCOLS. This is a very important workshop, as even a small leak from one of these casks could cause major injuries to an uneducated public who would not be aware of any risk until after they have already been injured.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) publishes its journal SCIENCE on a weekly basis. The 25 October 2002 issue of SCIENCE has a picture on page 728 which you should study before the workshop. It shows the radiation burns suffered by a Georgian man who slept for a few hours against a very small, inadequately shielded, canister of radioactive material. The horrible thing about these burns is that they go through the whole body - they don't stop at the skin, they also burn the internal organs.

(SCIENCE, Vol. 298, No. 5594, 25 Oct 2002, page 728.)

(The U.S. Army has had similar photos in its classified documents for at least 45 years.)

Lower dosage effects on internal organs - particularly the thyroid - are less spectacular but can be just as life-threatening. Radioactive dust would be a nightmare.

One of the worrisome aspects of spent fuel casks is that there have been several audited instances of field repairs being performed on faulty casks without proper documentation of what was done in each case. (Welding cracked bands, for example, without recording the temperature, time interval, or welding material used.) Hence, there are some storage casks now in use which are of unknown strength and condition. Any transportation standards to be set may be meaningless if we don't know the actual breaking points of these storage casks.

I know your hearts and minds are in the right place.

Thank you for your continuing concern and efforts.

Joseph Schmitt

[If you are a member of AAAS, you may retrieve the picture from the internet. Log onto www.sciencemag.org and click on "browse archives" which appears near the top of the opening screen. On the next screen move down to the listing just below the pictures of recent covers and choose volume 298

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which runs from October to December 2002. Next, choose the 25 October 2002 issue and its table of contents. Then move down almost to the bottom end of the table of contents where, among the news focus items, you will find an article titled "Stalin's Forgotten Cure". This article is about medical procedures for difficult to treat infections; the picture is part of it. Download the PDF version of the article and look at it with Adobe Acrobat Reader 5.0 or later. You will need your 8 digit AAAS membership number in order to make the download run. Alternatively, if your library subscribes to SCIENCE they may be able to download the article for you.]