

Nuclear Hotseat #787 - July 28, 2026 - Vina Colley on Piketon/Portsmouth and RECA + Joseph Mangano on Piketon Cancer Rates

Libbe HaLevy: [00:00:00] Nuclear contamination. The Piketon-Portsmouth site in Ohio ranks as one of the most toxic and contaminated locations in the country, with radioactive waste from the defunct Portsmouth gaseous diffusion plant contaminating air, land, dust that is being spread by the site's demolition, and food grown in proximity to it.

And then there's the water. It takes a genuine expert, an activist who has spent more than four decades fighting for justice for her community, and when she addresses water quality problems resulting from this contamination and tells you-

Vina Colley: And then you've got these waste cells that are sitting on top of the largest aquifer in the Midwest.

There's two or three bedrocks there and aquifers, and two of them are already contaminated. And the third one, it's the Teays River Valley, and we're pretty sure that it's leaking in that Teays [00:01:00] River Valley. And if so, it's gonna go all the way from southern Ohio all the way up to Indiana. And then whatever comes out of Scioto River goes to the Ohio River and goes all the way to the Mississippi.

So Piketon is contaminating a lot of people, not just us, all the way to the Mississippi and all the way to Indiana.

Libbe HaLevy: Well, when Vina Colley, head of Piketon-Portsmouth Residents for Environmental Safety and Security, known as PRESS, tells you the truth about the contamination problems at that site, how it's been covered up, and how close the area is to finally being included under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act...

Many more angles from which to view that awful, deadly, dangerous seat that we all share.

Nuclear Hotseat Theme: Nuclear Hotseat. What are those people thinking? Nuclear Hotseat. What [00:02:00] have those boys been drinking? Nuclear Hotseat. The corium is sinking. Our time to act is shrinking, but the activists are linking.

Nuclear Hotseat. It's da bomb

Libbe HaLevy: Welcome to Nuclear Hotseat, the weekly international news magazine keeping you up to date on all things nuclear from a different perspective. We're a show for people who know nothing about nuclear who want to know something, and people who know something who would like to know just a little bit more.

My name is Libbe HaLevy I'm the producer and host, as well as a survivor of the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island from just one mile away, so I know what can happen. Vina Colley. She is president and director of Piketon-Portsmouth Residents for Environmental Safety and [00:03:00] Security, known as PRESS. She tells us about the radioactive and toxic contamination of that southern Ohio site, the cover-ups, the ongoing dangers, and the recent developments that bring the area within sight of being covered by the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, or RECA.

It's a personal story as well as a political one. And as Vina has lived through some of its worst consequences, she's the one to tell it. I will also include an excerpt from an interview with Joseph Mangano, an epidemiologist and head of Radiation and Public Health Project. He has studied the available data on the Piketon-Portsmouth site, published three papers on it, and puts into perspective just how awful the on-site and community contamination is.

We will also have nuclear news from around the world. Jack Cohen-Joppa of The Nuke Resistor with another story from our shared history of [00:04:00] activist resistance to nuclear reactors and weapons. And along with that, a lot of honest and verifiable nuclear information, all of it coming up in just a few moments.

Today is Tuesday, July twenty-eight, twenty twenty-six, and here is this week's nuclear news from a different perspective. The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act, or RECA as it is known, is intended to provide financial compensation to victims of illnesses caused by nuclear radiation from atmospheric testing, Manhattan Project legacy waste sites, manufacturing of nuclear weapons and fuel.

It specifically targets downwinders, on-site test participants, and uranium industry workers. Given that Ohio's Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant, referred to as Ports, worked with plutonium and enriched uranium for nuclear weapons, naval propulsion, [00:05:00] and commercial power plants from nineteen fifty-four until two thousand and one.

So you'd think it would be top of the list for RECA, but it was left off the initial round of recognized sites. Now it's on a list to be included pending a push by not only local residents, but all of us to get our congressional representatives to vote for it. To learn more about what the problems have been there, the impact on personal health, how it was covered up, and what this new step with Rica not only means, but still needs to have happen to become a reality, I spoke with Vine Colley.

She is president and director of Piketon Portsmouth Residents for Environmental Safety and Security, known as PRESS, and co-founder of National Nuclear Workers for Justice. She is a 40-year veteran of the fight for cleanup and financial restitution, and she is also a former employee of Ports who has experienced the devastation it wrought on her own health [00:06:00] and that of her family.

I spoke with Vina Colley on July 27th, 2026.

Speaker 4: Vina Colley, it's always great to have you here with us on Nuclear Hotseat.

Vina Colley: Well, thank you for having me, 'cause you're one of my favorite shows.

Libbe HaLevy: You are in the Piketon/Portsmouth area of Ohio. What is that area like, specifically the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant, which is a site that is referred to as Ports?

Vina Colley: It has one of the highest cancer rates in the nation, and 107% above childhood leukemia, according to Dr. Joseph Mangano.

Libbe HaLevy: Let's talk about the physical site itself. What is the Gaseous Diffusion Plant, what did it do, and what did it leave behind?

Vina Colley: They did nuclear weapons here, and from 1954 to 1992 or 2000, I'm not sure what, [00:07:00] we reprocessed reactor fuel, and we weren't supposed to be doing that.

And reactor fuel is transuranics like plutonium and neptunium and americium. Uh, we were supposed to be an enrichment facility, and we enriched the highest assay of uranium here for weapons-grade material. But they gummed up this whole system when they brought stuff in from West Valley, New York, Hanford, Paducah, Savannah River, and they gummed us up with these transuranics.

And plus, in '92, they brought stuff in here from Russia. It was called the megatons to megawatts production.

Libbe HaLevy: And when you say transuranics, you are referring to radioactive materials that are entirely man-made, and that they were made in the waste stream from this facility.

Vina Colley: It was fed into our system.

The plutonium and the neptunium and [00:08:00] americium was fed into our system by them sending transuranic waste to Piketon, and putting it in their system, and reprocessing it.

Libbe HaLevy: You have a personal history with Ports as well. Tell us about your involvement there.

Vina Colley: I started to work there in 1980, and by 1983, I thought it was the safest place I ever worked.

And I was breaking out in rashes, and my hair was breaking off real bad, and we were g- I was going to the doctor to figure out what was going on. He said it looks like I have a, some bad allergies or something. And so about the fourth or fifth time I went to him, he asked me, he said, "What kind of chemicals are you working in d- out there at the Portsmouth plant?"

And I said, "Well, I've been working with trichloroethylene, and we've been cleaning down the electric equipment that had this oil on it." And he said, "Sounds to me like you may be highly allergic to that." So I went back to work, not knowing it was my job for sure, and by 1985, I had [00:09:00] been in a couple of big releases at the plant.

And so with my research, I found out that that polychlorinated biphenyl oil was radioactive oil. It was leaking from the system, leaking through those gaskets, and it was leaking onto the electric equipment. And I don't know where the PCB oil come from, if it was part of the product or if it wasn't oil after all, maybe it was all radioactive material.

And in 1983, I filed a grievance 'cause I felt like more than 30 workers were being exposed to radiation.

Libbe HaLevy: When you were doing the work on the cleanup and you were around the oil, what level of protection were you given so that you wouldn't be impacted by the toxicity of it?

Vina Colley: We were given hard hats and safety glasses, that's it.

We wore a blue uniform, coveralls for maintenance people. Everyone wore those and, and at one time they were buying our boots, but then they quit buying our [00:10:00] shoes and we were tracking this stuff home. By 1983, '84, I went back to work. They put me in this, uh, building called the Roundhouse, 300 building, and I was up in the cable trays because the guy that I was working with, he had a heart attack, and he was unable to get in the cable trays.

So I went up there, and I could see this mist, and I was breaking out all over with rashes, and I could see this oil again. And I ask, I say, "How did that oil get in the trays?" He said, "Oh, maybe maintenance or something, and they, uh, filled it out of their pocket oil," you know, where you have these little oil containers.

But I called health physics to come and check the area, because I didn't wanna get in trouble with the, uh, plant, and they said to use these red phones. So I used the red phone and I called health physics, and they came over. And of course, when you use those phones on plant site, it goes right back to Department of Energy and Department of Defense, because this is a Department of Defense facility and [00:11:00] a DOE facility.

And so, uh, they came over and checked it, and they said, "Ma'am, you're better than our equipment." He says, "You're picking this up better than we do." As far as I knew, it was still just oil and the trichloroethylene. When we cleaned down these transformers into the process buildings with the trichloroethylene, and when we got done, I said, "What do we do with this?"

And they said, "Just dump it in the drains." Well, those drains went to Little Beaver Creek, to the Scioto River, to the Ohio River. So we were dumping radioactive material down these drains in trichloroethylene. My boss put me outside, 'cause they had to keep an eye on me because I was having too much trouble breaking out.

And so when I went to this job outside, I was taking off electric equipment, these big ceramic things, and all of a sudden I see all this gray particles in the air. And I got scared, so I covered up my mouth, and I hurried up and got it done. [00:12:00] And my boss came and got me, and he was in a, uh, little golf

cart, and takes me over to the X330 building, and this is the building that they're demolating now.

And I said, "What's going on?" And he said, "Well, there's an alarm going off, a radiation alarm. We gotta go check out the alarm." So he takes me over to the building, we go to the top floor, and then he drives to the front of the building, and all of a sudden, here comes this big gray cloud after us. And he turned that golf cart around, and I said, "What's going on?"

He said, "Well, it's no longer our job." I said, "What do you mean it's no longer our job?" He said, "Just what I said, it's no longer our job." Well, he put me in a real major release and never told me. And when I went home, I got so sick that I had to go over to a lung doctor, and they took a biopsy of my lungs, and I had these small gray particles in my lungs.

And the doctor said, "You look just like another worker that was here," and I sent him down to Cincinnati to an occupational health and safety [00:13:00] doctor. About a week and a half later, two weeks, I went down to Cincinnati to the occupational health doctor. At his, that time, I think his name was Dr. Kelly, and he said to me, "You look like another patient that I just had up here."

And they took my urinalysis, and he says, "You have 2.12 fluorides in your urinalysis, and it's industrial exposure that you have."

Libbe HaLevy: Give us an idea as to how that relates to somebody who is healthy when he said you had 2.12 in your urine.

Vina Colley: It's an industrial exposure. Normally, people shouldn't have that in their urine.

Uh, of course, the Piketon plant released a whole lot of fluorides that no one's ever talked about. But anyway, uh, I was sick, and I finally went back to work 8... 1985, I never returned back to work because of this exposure. But my seniority carried on for seven years. I had seven years of seniority. [00:14:00]

Libbe HaLevy: That would also be seven years of being exposed to whatever was happening in the facility and around it, correct?

Vina Colley: Yeah, because that facility's releasing, releasing particulate matter and plutonium and neptunium and americium into the air and the water around here. So you don't have to be on site to get this stuff in your body. The company sent me to a doctor here in Portsmouth, his name was George Eastman, and he

said, "I don't see why you can't go back to work, but I can't examine you because they won't pay for the examination."

Libbe HaLevy: Oh, my.

Vina Colley: A year or so after I left his office, I had three tumors and a total hysterectomy. They took me off of workers' comp, and I have seven years of seniority where I should have been able to retire because I was disabled, and they made me disabled. I have chronic beryllium disease, and it's not curable.

It's a lung disease that's not curable, [00:15:00] and I have congestive heart failure, and I have neuropathy, and these are things that the Department of Labor are paying me for. They knew I was healthy when I went there, and they gave me all these extra tests. And so all of these things, the Department of Labor and the 10 medication that I have to take because of all of these illnesses is due to the plant that I worked at.

Libbe HaLevy: At what point did you start getting active in exploring, examining, holding the company to their responsibilities and calling out the dangers that were being created?

Vina Colley: I filed that grievance in 1983, and it went to the Department of Labor, and then the company come and asked me all kind of questions about that oil.

It was like they kept interrogating me for, like, four or five hours. And finally, I had told my husband something I was working in that I don't know what I was working in because they keep asking me the same questions. Well, I [00:16:00] read a congressional hearing where Senator Glenn was asking these contractors if that oil was radioactive oil, and the contractors would say, "Oh, no, no, no, it's just regular oil."

But Senator Glenn knew that oil was radioactive oil. It was leaking from the system, and this is what we were cleaning with no gloves, no paper coveralls, no mask, just blue coveralls and hard hats and safety glasses. And so then I read this article in the newspaper probably around '87, '88, and the, the community had filed a lawsuit, and they filed a lawsuit on the oil and the trichloroethylene, and of course, that law took 22 years to settle.

Libbe HaLevy: At what point did you join with others who were fighting against the plant?

Vina Colley: Uh, 1989, and they came out and they said... I told them my job and what I did and why I came to that meeting, and they [00:17:00] asked me to be their president of Portsmouth Piketon Residents for Environmental Safety and Security, and that's how I got involved with the community.

And the short name of that group is PRESS- PRESS ... when we refer to it from this point on. Mm-hmm. And then in 1999, I formed a group called National Nuclear Workers for Justice, because we were fighting for the compensation for the workers, and we were able to get the workers compensated because we had the plutonium documents.

They claim they don't have plutonium, so they made Piketon a special exposure cohort because from 1954, when Goodyear was there, to 1992, they never monitored us. And the badges that we wore, they put them in a chipper so you can't prove how much exposure that you had. And now, in '99, our representatives, Mike DeWine and George Voinovich, handed me a document that said that Piketon received undiluted [00:18:00] plutonium at Piketon.

I thought when I read that they were finally admitting that we had plutonium, and I never even thought about the classified documents. They have 5,000 classified documents that Paul Mobley, our expert, has been working on, and we have asked everyone in the state of Ohio, all of our representatives in Washington, DC, we've gave them 60 days to give us an answer.

And the reason these documents are important, because at Piketon, the workers got cut off in '92.

Libbe HaLevy: When you say they got cut off, what does that mean?

Vina Colley: They got cut off of the EEOICPA, the compensation put in place by Congress. And so a- after '92, anybody else has to prove their dose.

Libbe HaLevy: In other words, they have to prove how badly they were exposed- Yes

Vina Colley: in

Libbe HaLevy: order to apply for compensation or qualify for compensation?

Vina Colley: They, to expand the c- the, uh, spatial [00:19:00] cohort, and it's gonna be hard for them to prove it because they've classified these documents,

they classified the waste, and there's no way that these workers can prove how much exposures that they've had.

So it's really important that these documents get released so we can get our exposures calculated and the workers get expanded from '92 until decommissioning. And then in the meantime, we're working on RECA for the community, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act.

Libbe HaLevy: There have been difficulties because when RECA was passed to compensate those who were exposed to either the manufacturing or the use of nuclear weapons, they received a certain amount of compensation for their illnesses.

But Portsmouth/Piketon was not included in that. How did that play out for you in the years since that decision was made?

Vina Colley: Well, you know, I had the same [00:20:00] problem with the workers. They didn't wanna pay the workers, but I had the plutonium records. I worked with the RECA group when it went through for Oak Ridge and Paducah, and here we are, the largest facility in the world, and the most contaminated facility in the world, and we didn't make it.

But this time We've been pushing, and we made the list.

Libbe HaLevy: When did you make the list? When was that announcement made?

Vina Colley: That was announced at last week or so when the RECA Group and the Downwinders from the Trinity did a press conference, and we didn't have anybody in Ohio. Not one rep came for that press conference, and they were aware of it because we have been sending them stuff and sending their, talking to their representatives.

We were able to talk to Senator Molyan, M-O-L-Y-A-N, office, and he's the one who's writing up this bill for [00:21:00] RECA. Is he from Ohio or is he from elsewhere? No, he's not from Ohio. I believe he's from New Mexico, and God bless him for pushing this bill and trying to get the workers, I mean, the community compensated.

And from what I'm reading, it was anywhere from 50,000 to now, like, 150,000 if you have some of these cancers, the list of cancers, and some of the illnesses. So this is something really important for the Piketon community. Pike County

and Scioto County are added on this list, and we've been begging everyone to call these representatives and get on board.

Now, when this press release came out, I heard Mike DeWine in Columbus did a press release, and he had the Pike County Health officials do a, a combination of a press release saying that we were on the list. As far as I know, none of them are working on this.

Libbe HaLevy: But they claimed credit for it.

Vina Colley: Why, sure. It seems like a [00:22:00] lot of people claims credit for the work that we've done all these years.

It's, uh, kinda confusing and kinda complicated.

Libbe HaLevy: With you being on the list, is that the same as saying, yes, you can file and you can get compensation, or is there still some time before that can happen and some steps that need to be taken before that can happen?

Vina Colley: It has to go through Congress, and then it has to go through both of the houses.

So this is why it's so important for people to get on the phones on behalf of press and tell them to push RECA for us. And of course, we have a lot of people out west that's, hasn't been on the list yet either, but they're on the list now also, so hopefully we'll get them all through.

Libbe HaLevy: There's also a deadline on applying for RECA of December 31st, 2027, which quite objectively speaking is not that long a time, especially [00:23:00] since you can't apply yet and you don't know when this is going to come through.

In addition to us contacting our representatives and our senators to say, "Pass RECA and make certain that Piketon, Portsmouth is included," what other things can we do to not only get this passed, but speed it up so it can take place in a timely manner?

Vina Colley: The senator that's pushing the bill through is Moreland, and he needs to be contacted to get Piketon through this.

But we're waiting to get the bill to see h- what the bill says, and we haven't seen the bill yet. He's on board of this. He's the main pusher. I don't know if we have

a time limit for our community or not. That might be for the ones that's already been on the bill. Surely they wouldn't give us that short of a time limit, because we're talking about a whole lot of people here.

It's hard to talk about the bill when you haven't seen the actual bill.

Libbe HaLevy: We'll [00:24:00] continue with our interview with Vina Colley of Piketon Portsmouth Residents for Environmental Safety and Security in just a moment, but first... When I hear stories like the one on this week's show, I am filled with empathy for the victims, rage at the nuclear industry and its government enablers.

Sometimes, yes, a fleeting moment of hopelessness, but that passes quickly because I continue to produce Nuclear Hotseat as my way of fighting back against ongoing nuclear assumptions and boneheadedness, and empowering you to do the same. So what bothers you most about nuclear? The bombs? Forever quantities of highly radioactive with no place to safely store it or neutralize it?

Cancer threats? Contamination of land that many of us live near, if not on? You can do nothing about nuclear threats to health and safety without knowing the truth about nuclear, and communicating that truth is [00:25:00] the mandate of Nuclear Hotseat. We provide verifiable nuclear information that's been sourced, checked, and footnoted, plus interviews with people who are genuine experts on the nuclear industry and its impact on life, health, and our shared genetic future.

We also tell you about people on the front lines of activism around the world, their triumphs, challenges, and how you can help. But to keep doing so, we need your help. Nuclear Hotseat runs exclusively on donations, and we cannot survive without your support. So if you're grateful for the information you get from this show, now is the time to help us out.

Be it a one-time donation or monthly recurring of as little as \$5, the same for a cup of coffee, you'll be supporting the services required to keep this program running. Just go to nuclearhotseat.com and click on the red Donate button. If you have Zelle, you can [00:26:00] send money directly to info@nuclearhotseat.com.

We are a 501[c][3] nonprofit organization, which means that anything you donate is tax-deductible. Any amount helps, so please don't wait. Donate now. Go to nuclearhotseat.com, and whatever you can do to help, know that I'm grateful that you're listening and that you care. Now back to this week's featured interview with Vina Colley.

Vina Colley: So even though at this point you have less than a year and

Libbe HaLevy: a half to file if the same timeline is in effect, you haven't seen the bill, the bill hasn't passed, you don't know how long it's going to take, and all of that is eating into the period of time we're going to be allowed to apply for compensation for illnesses that they caused.

Vina Colley: Right. So far I haven't seen the paperwork for the community. I'm going to try to get, get somebody to give me that [00:27:00] next week I'm not for sure that, that there's gonna be a time limit on us yet, and I'm gonna try to get more information. I've already got a list of the cancers, and I'm gonna find out if there, there's a time limit.

But I'm telling people now to get their medical records, their death certificates, birth certificates, because you can apply for your parents. Whoever had cancer in this community will be able to apply for this. But it's best now to get the paperwork. Don't wait till the last minute, because like you said, there may be a time limit on us too.

We may already have a time limit. I will ask that question on Tuesday

Libbe HaLevy: I just wanna read the list of illnesses that are related to this that people can file for, because I was stunned with how many there were and how extensive, which implies that any and all of these are known to be caused by the kind of releases that were made at Piketon, [00:28:00] Princeton.

They include multiple myeloma, lymphomas other than Hodgkin's disease, renal disease, thyroid diseases, primary cancer of the thyroid, male or female breast, esophagus, stomach, pharynx, small intestine, pancreas, bile ducts, gallbladder, salivary glands, urinary bladder, brain, colon, ovary, liver, except if cirrhosis or hepatitis B is indicated, bone, renal, rectal, prostate, uterine, cervical, skin or lung cancer.

Basically, the entire body and anywhere in the body where cancer has shown up can be traced back to Piketon, Portsmouth be caused by what was done there.

Vina Colley: The workers have a list of 22 cancers that they're paying for, and then they pay for illnesses, and then they also pay, once you get on the Department of [00:29:00] Labor, they also pay for consequential illnesses like your medicine may have caused another problem.

So they do pay that. Now, the community won't get a medical card, and even some of the workers that didn't get paid through this compensation bill for the workers, the EE OICPA, they can also apply for this community thing. But my thing to them is, "Don't do that. Wait, and push, and help us get these classified documents so you can get your medical card."

Libbe HaLevy: And a medical card would allow them to make a claim as a worker. Is that at a higher level or a longer period of time?

Vina Colley: It just depends on when they worked there, after '92 or not, and we get these records unclassified, and then that means they're gonna have to do... All of these studies they've done here in Piketon are inconclusive by design.

They're gonna have to start all over, and they're gonna have to give these workers, like Bill Richardson said in the beginning, give them the [00:30:00] benefit of the doubt, and they're not doing that. I mean, I never got compensated until almost 2002. They locked my records up twice, and I had to get them unlocked in Washington, DC.

And each time you get your records unlocked, then you find something new in it, and then sometimes you find other workers' stuff in your records. Uh, the company gave me an in vivo, which is like, I explain it as a tanning bed. You lay in it, and it comes down with this lid, and it's a in vivo, it's a whole body counter. What they found in my lungs, they never told me.

They found neptunium, cesium 137, they found uranium, they found tech 99, but they never checked us for plutonium. But if you got neptunium, you probably got plutonium, and which I know they have plutonium. We've even have a, an area called 705, and one day I got a call from Mr. Salisbury, and he said, he said, "I don't know who to talk to," but he [00:31:00] said, "I see that you're out there and you're trying to help these workers."

And I gotta tell you, the workers in X705E area, they should be notarized that these workers were so contaminated they had to send them to Oak Ridge to have their body counts down. Sent them there two or three weeks in a row just to get their body counts down. And two or three of the workers that worked in that building I know dr- died of colon cancer.

And Doc- And Salisbury told me that he had colon cancer when I was talking to him. And actually in my records, I do have their exposures. I have been collecting names of victims off site, on site, for almost 40 years now, and it's

overwhelming of the people that are dying. And to give you an incident, my husband had melanoma cancer.

He passed away. His brother worked at the plant, he was a chemical operator, Gary Colley. He passed away. He had these nodules [00:32:00] in his lungs, and most of us have these nodules. They used to say it's caused from the dirt, but it's not. I mean, they told the Paducah workers the same thing. But anyway, Gary's turned into lymphoma cancer. And then his wife, who washed his clothes, she died of breast cancer.

And then his son, who worked at the plant, died of kidney cancer. None of them has the same type of cancer. Then I had a brother who died of small cell cancer, who never worked at the plant. I just had another brother who died of pancreatic cancer, who never worked at the plant. I had a nephew that had a brain tumor.

I had a niece who just died of pancreatic cancer, and I have a friend who had bowel cancer. I have I don't know how many friends right now that has breast cancer, and they don't care. They know this, 'cause I've been to every representative. I've been in Washington, DC. Our union was in Washington, DC in [00:33:00] 1978.

They stormed Senator Glenn's office over the health and safety issue of the plant. They pretended like they were gonna help them, and when they got back here, they went after the president of the union. Nothing was ever done. They covered it up.

Libbe HaLevy: Vina, it's painful to hear what you have been going through, what so many of your loved ones went through and have passed from, and that it is the system there.

This is what people are having to deal with. In addition to whatever their illnesses are, they have to deal with the bureaucracy that's trying to keep them from the truth.

Vina Colley: Back in the, the '90s, Prince did a cancer and a heart study, and you could see how it was, all of it was going uphill from people and cancers.

But what happened was, our cancer, people had to go to Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati, and our cancers were counted in their areas, not our [00:34:00] hometown. There was a petition was going around to do our ZIP codes. And so when they started doing our ZIP codes, then all of a sudden they could see the

big, the big raise in cancer here, and we've had, we got two or three cancer, cancer clinics here now that we never had.

That's how much cancer's in this community.

Libbe HaLevy: With all the problems that already exist in ports, in Pike- in Portsmouth, now the State of Ohio is doubling down and saying that they want to make your area a nuclear hub. That's what they're calling it. What are they planning, and what's wrong with this picture?

Take it.

Vina Colley: Number one, we have a nuclear board in Columbus that I think Michael DeWine put together. This nuclear board tells our community what we want, and from my understanding, Trump has got Japan and, uh, SoftBank on board [00:35:00] to give us small modular reactors, the data center, largest in the world here, and a gas power plant.

We don't want any of those. We want them to clean up the plant and to take care of our cancers, and then put something in here that we can work and don't have to worry about being exposed to anymore. They have HALO. HALO has been running since October of '23.

Libbe HaLevy: What is HALO?

Vina Colley: It's a high assay, low enriched uranium.

This high assay, low enriched uranium can fuel small modular reactors. Small modular reactors can fuel the data centers, and they wanna buy out 15 homes, they claim. So how can they buy out 15 homes that's off site and then sell these contractors contaminated land on site and tell them that that land is not contaminated?

How do you do that?

Libbe HaLevy: When you [00:36:00] say the 15 homes, why are they buying or why are they saying they are buying these 15 homes?

Vina Colley: Because they're the worst contaminated homes that they found yet. Now, I worked with Dr. Ketter, and Dr. Ketter, he has proven that there is 15 miles of contamination off site. We've take water, we took soil samples.

When you have these tests done, he directly talks to the homeowners. They claim that these 15 homes are contaminated, but they really wanna buy the land up 'cause they want to expand the Python plant. And getting rid of 15 homes is no homes at all. I mean, we've got people all the way here in Scioto County and Pike County, and actually not only just these two counties, but we got Vinton County, we got Adams County, we got Jackson County, we got Oakhill, and they're all within this area, but they're not in Scioto County.

But you can drive out of Scioto County and go right into these areas. There's a lot more people here that's affected [00:37:00] than just Scioto and Pike County. But right now, we have to get Scioto and Pike County in this bill, and get it passed, and take care of this community. This is my community. I've lived here all my life.

Some people say, "Why don't you move if you don't like it here?" I said, "I love it here." I said, "But I was here before the plant came here. Why should I have to move?"

Libbe HaLevy: It's remarkable how you keep going and keep fighting this, because listening to this story, it's so disheartening, it's so infuriating. It seems like there's an entire entrenched system that wants to keep you down, and what's so remarkable is that they've never been able to.

Vina Colley: No, they've tried a, a lot of things to cover me up. I mean, I could go through that. That'd be a whole new story. But I'm still, but I'm still here, and I'm still fighting, and I won't give up until I [00:38:00] get the community compensated for their cancers. I've fought for the workers, and now I'm fighting for the community, because our loved ones, our neighbors, our friends are going through radiation treatment, going through chemo.

And you wouldn't believe the breast cancer in these young girls now that's here. It's just, it's just heartbreaking. We're sacrificed. We're like guinea pigs. They don't care about us, and they bring all these contractors from out of town in here, and these contractors go back home. They don't even hardly spend all the money here.

You know, we have union workers that come and go out there, but most of these big guys, they get on a plane and go home every weekend. We don't see all that money, and we don't need all these jobs that they wanna put out there. But we do need jobs. We deserve to have a good job, something that pays big money and something that will hire the union and the, the people here, 'cause we're, we're workers.

We're good [00:39:00] workers. That's all we know. We're Appalachian people, and we work, and we take care of our own.

Libbe HaLevy: Do you have any final thoughts that you haven't had a chance to share yet?

Vina Colley: The biggest thing is please call representatives, get us in this Rica Bill, and get on Congress to make sure that they expand the Rica Bill.

Make sure they just don't ... All these other people that's on the list that's pretty much in, make sure they don't turn them down. We deserve it. We're like Cold War veterans here, you know? We did things for our government, and I can't believe... I just mistrust my government now after what I've seen them do and, and they continue to do it.

It's criminal If you and I would do the same thing that this plant has done, they would arrest you. They would put you up and not let you out no more. And we can't even get the Ohio EPA to post a sign in the creek that the creek is contaminated, and they've known it since [00:40:00] 1992. I went to the EPA office in Logan and I found a document, I have it sitting right here, that Little Beaver Creek was contaminated.

So at the last site Pacific Advisory Board, I asked him, "Can you please put the sign in the creek?" And he said, "Well, I found out there's property owners on both sides of the creek." And I said, "Well, they don't own the creek. Put it in the middle of the creek." And he said, "I have to go back and ask my boss."

They have to go back and ask their boss if they can put a sign in a creek that people have been baptized in, they fish in it, they swim in it, and there's like a low income trailer park in walking distance of this creek. Just a couple weeks ago when I was out there I saw a guy down there fishing with his dog.

That creek is contaminated, they know it's contaminated, and it's criminal that they're not doing something about it. We also have 24,000 depleted uranium cylinders on site that are [00:41:00] rusty, they give off neutron exposures, and they're just sitting there. It's just like Python is a dump site. And then they built 12 waste cells to decommission the site and throw everything in these waste cells.

And these waste cells are like, I describe them as a big trash can with a big black liner in it, and they're having trouble with the groundhogs. Groundhogs are eating through these liners, and so they're trying to kill all the groundhogs

off. So what happens when they walk away from this plant and they got a pump and treat going on with trichloroethylene, and it's gonna do that forever, pumping and treating, and then you got these waste cells that are sitting on top of the largest aquifer in the Midwest.

There's two or three bedrocks there and, and aquifers, and two of them are already contaminated, and the third one, it's the Teays River Valley, and we're pretty sure that it's leaking in that Teays [00:42:00] River Valley. And if so, it's gonna go all the way from Southern Ohio all the way up to Indiana. And then whatever comes out of Scioto River goes to the Ohio River and goes all the way to the Mississippi.

So Python is contaminating a lot of people, not just us, all the way to the Mississippi and all the way to Indiana

Libbe HaLevy: Vina, you are certainly a veteran warrior on this issue. You've been doing it for decades now, and I'm so sorry that you have to. It breaks my heart what you're going through physically, and that you're up against this megalithic government industrial complex that doesn't seem-

to care about the individual human life. None of that is fair. None of that is just. And the fact that even after all this time and everything you've been through, you are still fighting against it speaks [00:43:00] immeasurably about your spirit, your heart, and I wish your energy could be going to something more fun than this.

Vina Colley: Me too. I agree with you. The thing is, I'm not in it for the money. I've done all this without any grants. I paid out of my own pocket. For 40 years, I paid out of my own pocket. And so finally, when I got compensated through the compensation bill, I took my check and paid off all those credit cards. And so at least I'm out of debt.

Libbe HaLevy: Well, hopefully something better than that is on the horizon for you. Vina Colley, I don't know that I have words strong enough to express my admiration and my respect for your fighting spirit and for what you've been able to accomplish so far. And I wanna thank you for always keeping us in the loop, and for [00:44:00] being my guest once again this week on Nuclear Hotseat.

Vina Colley: Thank you for having me, Libby.

Libbe HaLevy: Vina Colley of Piketon Portsmouth Residents for Environmental Safety and Security, known as PRESS. We will have her links up

on our website, nuclearhotseat.com, under this episode, number 787. Vine cited Joseph Mangano of Radiation and Public Health Project repeatedly for his work establishing the cancer rates in Piketon.

Joe is an epidemiologist, a health researcher, whose job is to look at medical data and to tease out the underlying patterns they reveal to understand exactly what is going on. So I'm including an excerpt from an interview with Joe where he talks with great specificity about what he does and what he found in Piketon.

This is from an interview I did with Joseph Mangano for Nuclear Hotseat number 700 from November 19th, 2024. [00:45:00] As an epidemiologist, explain to the listeners what you do and why you do it, what it is meant to achieve.

Speaker 4: Uh, an epidemiologist is a fancy word for health statistician, okay? What an epidemiologist does is analyze trends and patterns of disease and death rates in a particular area, and over time.

It's as simple as that.

Libbe HaLevy: What has been your interest in the area around the Piketon Gaseous Diffusion Plant in Ohio, and how long have you been working on it?

Speaker 4: My odyssey with Piketon began in the summer of 2022 when I got a phone call from members of the ONFN, Ohio Nuclear Free Network. They're a citizens-based group concerned about Portsmouth and other nuclear facilities in Ohio.

What they asked me to do was to do a report on the patterns [00:46:00] of disease rates and trends of disease rate near Portsmouth. And since then, I have produced three reports, 2022, '23, and just now, November 2024

Libbe HaLevy: What was the nature of their concern in wanting you to check these statistics?

Speaker 4: Well, their concerns really are typical of what happens near a nuclear plant.

The concerns begin not from the top, but from the grassroots. People expressing, uh, beliefs that there are an exceptionally large number of cancers in the area, or people who are dying. That has occurred in, in near Portsmouth for a long time. M- more recently, the next step was taken to see how much of this

radioactivity was actually in the environment, and that was, that led to studies by Dr.

Michael Ketterer, who's [00:47:00] a chemistry professor from Northern Arizona University. He found near the plant, and even in the counties beyond that, levels of radioactivity such as plutonium, neptunium, uranium, and, and several others.

Libbe HaLevy: These are all radioactive elements.

Speaker 4: These are all highly radioactive elements that, uh, last forever in the world.

Then, then the third step, the third question really comes down to, okay, we believe there's a lot of cancer in the area, and we know that there's radioactivity in the area. Is this real? And that's when they turned to me. And what I did was essentially use the CDC's website. They keep a nice annual list of mortality in the US every year from 1968 to 2023, and analyze the, the trends in cancer and other diseases.

Libbe HaLevy: [00:48:00] What is it that you found?

Speaker 4: First report was late 2022 That focused strictly on Pike County. Pike County is the location of Portsmouth. It is a small county. It's mostly consisting of rural areas and, and small towns. The population's about 27,000. It is a generally low socioeconomic area. Poverty rate is high.

The unemployment rate is high. Percent without any access to medical care is high. Education rates are, are lower, and so on. So I went into it expecting to find rates that are higher than, say, the, the United States average.

Libbe HaLevy: And when you say rates, you're talking about cancer rates?

Speaker 4: Cancer rates and rates of mortality, death rates from all causes combined.

Sometimes cancers aren't always coded a- as cancer, so [00:49:00] I, I, I think it's important to, to do both. And here's what I found. The first thing is really going back to 1950. For a long time, the Pike County cancer death rate was below the US, a- about 12% below the US in the 1950s and 1960s. You would expect that because it wasn't the home to any great polluting industries.

However, as time went on, the low cancer rate county became a high cancer rate county. The mortality at last count for all people was about 33% above the, the United States. That's a big difference. I also found out that death rates for all causes combined, for a long time the county's death rate was oh, 10 or 15% above the US, and this is through the '60s, and the [00:50:00] '70s, and, and the '80s, early in the operation of, of Portsmouth.

And that wasn't a surprise. In a county that is poor, that doesn't have great access to healthcare and so on, that is something that, uh, you would expect. However, in addition, I found that the death rate for all people from all causes, people under 75 years old, we would call this the premature death rate.

For a long time when the plants opened, it was about 10 or 15% above US, which is understandable. But beginning about 40 years ago, that 10% rate grew steadily until now. Premature death rate is 107% above US rate. More than double the US, one of the highest rates of any of the many, the thousands of US counties.[00:51:00]

That is a very, very important finding. So important that second report that I did addressed two questions. One question is, well, maybe this is just Appalachian. Maybe it's just the fact that it's a poor area. And the other issue is, well, is it only Pike County or does it go further? What I did was to take the seven county area around Portsmouth, including Pike County, the seven counties Adams, Gallia, Jackson, Lawrence, all these counties are, are kind of like Pike County.

Rural, small towns, poor. And I compared their premature death rate with other Ohio poor counties that are much further away from Portsmouth. And been an increase in premature death rates. In the area near Portsmouth, it is much, much greater, much more rapid. The, the [00:52:00] gap is growing between poor counties near Portsmouth and poor counties far from Portsmouth.

It is not just Appalachia.

Libbe HaLevy: What does this speak to, and how alarming is it?

Speaker 4: It speaks to the fact that these dangerous radioactive chemicals were not just produced, but released into the environment and were ingested by humans through breathing and the food chain. A combination of, of the two. There's been some discussion about this.

We- there's no way of knowing exactly how much is breathed in or from the food chain, but that's how any kind of radiation from any nuclear plant is taken

into the human body. And once in the human body, we know that these chemicals damage cells, destroy cells, leading to higher risk of diseases such as cancer, birth defects, and, and other conditions.

[00:53:00] There can be other reasons why these rates are so high, but there's nothing obvious other than poverty, which has been the case in the area for a, a long time. Nothing's really changed. It was poor years ago, and it's still poor. But what has changed is the addition of this large toxic plant.

Libbe HaLevy: Joseph Mangano of Radiation and Public Health Project.

You can find him at their website, radiation.org, and we will link to the full interview from Nuclear Hotseat number 700 on this week's website, Nuclear Hotseat number 787.

Activist Shoutout: Activist shoutouts

Libbe HaLevy: Here for another milk and cookie storytelling time is Jack Cohen-Joppa of the Nuke Resister, with another story from our shared history of activist resistance to nuclear reactors [00:54:00] and weapons. This week, in the wake of the first US war on Iraq, a quartet of nuclear abolitionists faced hostility from a federal judge and prosecutors in North Carolina as they spoke truth to power.

Jack Cohen-Joppa: Speaking truth to power is a cornerstone of civil disobedience. But what if power just doesn't want to hear it? That's what happened to four nuclear abolitionists in the winter of 1994 in a federal courthouse in North Carolina. This quartet took the name Pax Christi Spirit of Life Plowshares, taking action in the tradition of disarmament protests known as Plowshares, because they answered the biblical call to beat swords into plowshares.

In the early hours of December 7th, 1993, Philip Berrigan, Father John Dear, Lynn Frederickson, and Bruce Friedrich breached the fence at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina. It was Pearl Harbor Day, a tragedy they [00:55:00] sought, as Phil later wrote from jail, to reclaim from rage and vengeance.

Instead, they found the Air Force on high alert, marking the anniversary with surprise war games. Wading through water and crossing rough terrain, they avoided hundreds of mobilized aviators before dashing to their destination, a

nuclear-capable F-15E warplane at the end of the runway, bathed in floodlights and ready for flight.

In the two minutes before MPs arrived, their hammers struck the plane's bomb mounts, guidance system, antenna, intake valves, and fuselage. They splashed blood on the bomber and unfurled a banner declaring, "Disarm and live." They left behind copies of their action statement and an indictment of the United States for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The F-15E had been a mainstay of the 1991 war against Iraq, and it was and still is the most capable aircraft for [00:56:00] delivering nuclear weapons. This Plowshares action highlighted the deadly connection between U.S. nuclear threats and its conventional war-making abroad. Charged with felony destruction of government property, the four were jailed without bond when they would not agree to stay away from the base.

They chose to represent themselves in court, but were denied advisory counsel. Their trial date was changed three times and finally moved up on short notice to February 15th, thus limiting the number of supporters who planned to attend. A pretrial motion in limine common in such trials barred the defendants from saying anything at all about the moral and political justification for their action.

Undeterred, Lynn Frederickson began their defense by reading their opening statement. "This court, like all others, protects the interests of the national security state," she began, "and used its illegitimate power to suppress the truth." [00:57:00] Judge Terrence Boyle objected. "You're impugning the integrity of the court," he said, and ordered her to stop.

Lynn raised her voice and kept reading, and Boyle declared her in contempt. When a marshal ripped the statement from her hands, John began reading from his copy. Bruce took over when the marshals went for John before he too was stopped from speaking their truth. Phil and his co-defendants then turned their backs to the judge as some 20 courtroom supporters joined them in reciting the Lord's Prayer and singing peace songs.

An infuriated Judge Boyle found John and Bruce in contempt of court as well, simply for the words they had read aloud. Six supporters were also found in contempt and summarily sent to jail for six months. That afternoon, Boyle said the jury had been contaminated. He declared a mistrial and sent the defendants back to jail as well.

Seeking to deter more courtroom resistance, he then ordered that the four face separate [00:58:00] jury trials in April. In April, a dozen security officers were posted in the courtroom at all times at each trial, creating a hostile environment. Several rows of seats were kept empty while many of the Plowshares supporters could not even enter the courthouse.

At each trial, vindictive prosecutors repeatedly objected, and the defendants were constantly warned by the judge that the Bible, their religious views, the role of the F-15 in bombing Iraq and in U.S. nuclear war preparations were all irrelevant. When Phil Berrigan called co-defendant John Dear to the stand, the prosecutor asked the priest, "Who drove the car that brought them to the base?"

"The Holy Spirit drove us to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base," John told a most unamused Judge Boyle, who later told the jury to disregard all of his testimony. At the start of her trial, Lynn Frederickson was again stopped mid-sentence as she told the jury, "We poured blood on it to expose it [00:59:00] as a tool of death."

The judge sent the jury out before listening to her full statement, which he quickly declared was entirely irrelevant. In good conscience, Lynn remained silent for the rest of her trial. Each of four juries rendered quick convictions. That summer, Felice and I were on a cross-country car trip with our kids to see family, and we were able to visit Phil, John, and Bruce in the county jail just before they were sentenced.

We spoke through the glass, the men crowded on one side and Felice and I on the other in the small visiting room, our two young children behaving themselves in the waiting room just outside the door. Lynn's jailer wouldn't let us in. In July, the four were sentenced to 8 to 15 months in federal prison, plus probation and restitution.

Of their contemptuous supporters, five were released after three weeks, while the sixth was let go after serving three months. This has been Jack Cohen-Joppa for Nuclear Hotseat, [01:00:00] with a story about the costs of speaking truth to power from the archives of the Nuclear Resister.

Libbe HaLevy: Thank you, Jack. 13 films that are essential to understanding the nuclear age have been compiled by Alex Wellerstein, the man behind Nuke Map and so much more.

We'll have that link up on our website, nuclearhotseat.com, under this episode number 787. And a reminder that on August 6th, the anniversary of Hiroshima,

my play, Atomic Bill and the Payment Due, will be presented in a staged reading in Bellport, Long Island, with the support of now a dozen peace groups, both locally and nationally.

It will be at 6 p.m. Attendance is free. No reserved seats, just come and get them. And as a footnote to history, I will be playing the lead female role, and will be playing the role of Karl Grossman. [01:01:00] If you can make it, it's not to be missed. This has been Nuclear Hotseat for Tuesday, July 28, 2026.

If you'd like to get Nuclear Hotseat delivered by email every week, you can sign up for it on your favorite podcast channel, or just go to nuclearhotseat.com. Look for the yellow opt-in box, put in your first name and email address, and every week you'll get one email with the link to that week's show and a short description of its content.

You'll get it as soon as it posts. That way, you won't miss anything. This episode of Nuclear Hotseat is copyright 2026 Libbe HaLevy and Nuclear Hotseat. All rights reserved, but fair use allowed, as long as you cite the program, website, names of any guests whose comments you use, and me. For now, this is Libbe HaLevy of Nuclear Hotseat, reminding you that ignoring the impact of nuclear radiation on our lives and health doesn't change the scientific facts of what [01:02:00] it's doing to us.

It just keeps us trapped in the danger. There it is, your nuclear wake-up call. So whatever you do, don't go back to sleep, because we are all in the Nuclear Hotseat.

Nuclear Hotseat Theme: Nuclear Hotseat. What are those people thinking? Nuclear Hotseat. What have those boys been drinking? Nuclear Hotseat. The corium is sinking.

Our time to act is shrinking, but our activists are linking.

Nuclear Hotseat. It's da bomb