

***In the Shadow of Plutopia: Living Downwind and Downstream  
from the World's First Plutonium Plants***

Kate Brown, author [Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters](#)

Friday, October 25, 2013

7 p.m.–9 p.m.

Washington State University Tri-Cities East Auditorium  
[ <http://ourhanfordhistory.org/70.php> ]

While many transnational histories of the nuclear arms race have been written, Kate Brown provides the first definitive account of the great plutonium disasters of the United States and the Soviet Union. In *Plutopia*, Brown draws on official records and dozens of interviews to tell the extraordinary stories of Richland, Washington and Ozersk, Russia—the first two cities in the world to produce plutonium. To contain secrets, American and Soviet leaders created plutopias—communities of nuclear families living in highly-subsidized, limited-access atomic cities. Fully employed and medically monitored, the residents of Richland and Ozersk enjoyed all the pleasures of consumer society. Nearby, migrants, prisoners, and soldiers lived in ghettos, labor camps and garrisons. They often performed the most dangerous work at the plant. Brown shows that the plants' segregation of permanent and temporary workers and of nuclear and non-nuclear zones created a bubble of immunity, where dumps and accidents were glossed over and plant managers freely polluted. In four decades, the Hanford plant near Richland and the Maiak plant near Ozersk each issued at least 200 million curies of radioactive isotopes into the surrounding environment, laying waste to hundreds of square miles and contaminating rivers, fields, forests, and food supplies. Because of the decades of secrecy, downwind and downriver neighbors of the plutonium plants had difficulty proving what they suspected, that the rash of illnesses, cancers, and birth defects in their communities were caused by the plants' radioactive emissions. *Plutopia* was successful because in its zoned-off isolation it appeared to deliver the promises of the American dream and Soviet communism; in reality, it concealed disasters that remain highly unstable and threatening today.

## **Downwinders: Twenty-five years of Activism**

**Jay Mullen**, former CIA Uganda operative, retired S. Oregon University history professor.

**Tom Bailie**, farmer, rancher, activist, spokesperson for his generation and subsequent ones.

**Trisha Pritikin**, lawyer, occupational therapist, advocate and key organizer of the panel.

**Paul Haeder**, reporter, educator, activist, and discussion moderator.

“Downwinders” became a term soon after March 1986 when, in response to mounting public pressure, the Department of Energy released thousands of documents pertaining to past Hanford operations to activists in eastern Washington. Activists and others were concerned after significant numbers of people who had lived near the Hanford plant began to develop disabling illness and questioned whether Hanford was the cause. The public was shocked to learn that these documents revealed decades of radiation releases from Hanford onto unsuspecting populations downwind. By 1993, more than 4000 plaintiffs had filed personal injury lawsuits against the prime contractors who operated Hanford during years of offsite releases. The Downwinders’ personal injury lawsuits have dragged on in court for over 23 years. Private defense attorneys have racked up legal bills of more than 60 million dollars, all paid for with taxpayer money under indemnity agreements signed by Hanford operators in the early years of Hanford operations. Attorneys for health-damaged plaintiffs have been forced to rely on their own financial resources throughout over two decades of litigation. This is truly an uneven playing field.

Three Hanford "Downwinders" involved in bringing this story to light will speak about their experiences. All three were children during early years of Hanford operations. One was born and raised in Richland, the child of two Hanford workers. The second grew up on a farm just downwind of the facility, and the third was a child on a military base downwind, within Idaho. All three have experienced thyroid and other health problems they believe were caused by their exposures to Hanford’s offsite radiation releases.

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