

Silkwood a martyr?

If there's truth to the saying that where there's smoke there's fire, the nuclear-power industry should probably call the fire department, because its house could be burning down.

In the wake of the recent reactor accident at Three Mile Island, Pa., and increasing public concern about the safety of nuclear plants and the hazards of radioactive wastes, the strange case of Karen Silkwood's bizarre contamination by plutonium and the mysterious circumstances surrounding her death in a 1974 car accident have added a new wrinkle to the question of continued reliance on nuclear power as a long-term source of energy.

The \$10.5 million verdict reached Friday against Kerr-McGee Corp. in a lawsuit charging the conglomerate with negligence in the operation of its plutonium-producing plant near Crescent, Okla., marks the first time a U.S. nuclear-products firm has been held liable for radioactive contamination occurring outside its facilities. If the verdict is upheld in appeals courts, it could set a legal precedent allowing other radiation victims to sue for damages with a good chance of recovery. Residents of Middleton, Pa., where the Three Mile Island reactor leaked significant amounts of radiation, those living near a Denver, Colo. nuclear facility who were contaminated by radiation resulting from a 1969 fire and people affected by nuclear testing in the Southwest are among the potential plaintiffs.

But the ramifications of the Silkwood verdict go beyond the untold millions of dollars that the nuclear-power industry could have to pay in compensation to the victims of radiation contamination. Evidence uncovered at the trial, particularly forged safety records, the disappearance

of 40 pounds of plutonium — enough to make four bombs — and testimony specifying gross violations of employee safeguards points to an alarming pattern of neglect, deceit and utter disregard of the dangers of exposure to plutonium, as little as one-millionth of a gram of which can lead to cancer.

Even though the revelations from the Silkwood case tend to undermine public faith in the nuclear-power industry, surely such flagrant negligence cannot be the norm throughout government agencies and among corporations and utilities that control and use radioactive materials in the United States. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission acts as a watchdog to ensure public safety from the hazards of radiation exposure, by closely monitoring manufacture of nuclear fuel, operation of nuclear plants and disposal of nuclear wastes. Furthermore, the 70-odd nuclear power plants currently licensed for operation in the United States provide 12 percent of the nation's energy needs at a time when consumption of oil is perhaps in danger of overreaching its supply. Nuclear power is going to be around for a while.

But no matter how long nuclear power will be a part of American life, the government and the industry should take an active, vigorous role, not only in preventing future outrages like the Karen Silkwood incident, but in developing safe, long-term disposal for an ever-mounting garbage heap of indestructible radioactive wastes, as well as searching for viable energy alternatives.

In the minds of some, Karen Silkwood may well have become a martyr. To others, she has become a vivid symbol of the very real dangers of nuclear power, especially as the crucial balance between its hazards and its benefits weighs on our minds as never before.

Summer magic

Chapel Hill has been called "a town touched by a strange magic." In summer, this strange magic takes on a more beautiful and luminous tone than usual.

The summer solstice is less than a month away and even the most industrious student finds this seasonal magic beckoning from open windows.

Though the days when dogs slept undisturbed on summer streets at high noon are gone forever, people can still take a leisurely stroll down Franklin Street without being defamed by the noisome roar accompanying most city thoroughfares.

Returning Carolina students notice more subtle changes affecting the village, as some professors begin to shed three-piece suits, in favor of open-neck shirts and denim jeans. One can imagine instructors wistfully hoping an errant Frisbee will fall at their feet, affording the opportunity for a quick graceful return.

The slow, easy ritual of baseball games replaces the pageantry of football and the fever of basketball.

Even the coolest classroom seems stifling at times to student and

professor alike, resulting in more classes forming semi-circular clusters on Polk Place.

Visiting students discover the lifestyle which is the mark of the Southern Part of Heaven. Attempts to bar-hop through each of Chapel Hill's watering holes in one night more often than not, fail abysmally.

But opportunities for meeting members of the opposite sex are as frequent as one has been told by friends. You didn't think all those people in the library were actually studying, did you?

Visiting and returning students alike find the temptations to leave text books sitting half-read on desk tops more appealing than before. Do not be overly shocked to find professors delivering more extemporaneous lectures as the summer proceeds; they find the temptations just as appealing.

Those lures assume the most seductive forms imaginable. The gentle murmuring of breezes through lusciously green trees, the sound of splashing water from swimming pools, moisture-beaded glasses of wine, a gloriously Carolina-blue sky, and on some rare nights, the plaintive cry of a bag-pipe rolling across McCorkle Place, all vie for the attention of the Chapel Hillian.

DUI penalties stiffened

Editor's note: This advice is prepared by Student legal services, which maintains an office in Suite A of the Carolina Union. UNC students have prepaid for this service and may obtain advice at no additional charge.

Since March 1, 1979, new and stiffer penalties for driving under the influence (DUI) are in effect. Generally, the new penalties provide for a jail term upon conviction of a second offense, while still leaving much discretion in the judge.

For the first offense DUI the fine is not less than \$100 and not more than \$500. If a prison term is imposed, it cannot be more than six months. Whether a person would receive both a fine and prison term lies within the discretion of the judge.

For the second offense the fine is not less than \$200 and not more than \$500. Imprisonment shall not be less than three days and not more than one year. The judge is allowed to substitute "drunk school" for that three-day minimum sentence. The

three-day sentence may be suspended if the driver successfully completes the course. Should the driver be convicted of a third or subsequent DUI charge, the fine cannot be less than \$500 and imprisonment of not less than three days and not more than two years. For the third or subsequent offense, drunk school cannot be substituted for the three-day minimum sentence.

When the statue speaks of driving under the influence, it contemplates more than the influence of alcohol. It also includes impairment brought on by "narcotic drugs, or other impairing drugs . . ."

ADVICE OF THE DAY:

- 1.) Remember that not only is driving and drinking dangerous, the possible legal consequences of conviction are even stiffer now.
- 2.) A second conviction of DUI could result in a jail term, drunk school, or both.
- 3.) Driving under the influence encompasses both alcohol and drugs.

THE SUMMER

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