Anticipating the Unprecedented: Nuclear Emergency Response and the Changing Repertoires of Justification

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Tuesday, March 5, 2019
Ireland’s Four Courts
2051 Wilson Blvd, Arlington, VA
6 pm Social, 7 pm Dinner, 8 pm Speaker

Menu:
Appetizers, Choice of Salad or Soup, Choice of Entrée, Dessert, Cash Bar
Choose One: Aran Island Salmon, Jameson Steak, Chicken Tullamore, Veggie Lasagne

Cost:
$30 members, $35 non-members, $10 students

RSVP:
Please RSVP by Monday, March 4.
Register online at https://bwchps.wildapricot.org/event-3253657
or email Dan Blumenthal at bwchps.meetings@gmail.com

Metro:
Court House Metro (Orange/Silver Line) is 1 block away

Parking:
There are 20 free parking spots and metered/garage parking nearby. Please visit the restaurant website for details.

Hosted by Baltimore-Washington Chapter of the Health Physics Society
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Nuclear preparedness and response have returned to center stage after Fukushima, the latest in a series of “beyond design basis accidents”. The event demonstrated, yet again, that the ability of nuclear utilities, nation states, and even international organizations to respond quickly and effectively to nuclear disasters is seriously flawed. This lack of emergency response capability and expertise reveals a precarious imbalance in the world’s nuclear infrastructure.

Each severe nuclear accident brings initiatives to ramp up emergency response capabilities, but an enduring challenge has been the anticipated non-use of these capabilities. Maintaining an effective response capability on alert for events that are not only highly undesirable, but also very unlikely, is costly and demands new repertoires of justification: material, expertise, and process know-how need to be kept on hair-trigger alert, while knowing (and hoping) that this alert may never come. How long does it make sense to fund an expensive inventory of artifacts that may never be needed? How would one train emergency responders that will hopefully never actually need to use their skills? And how does non-use become part of a justification – for continued funding, diligent maintenance and upgrading, regular practice, etc.?

This talk will present some of the attempts made after Chernobyl to preserve valuable disaster mitigation lessons, both at the national and international levels, and compare those to post-Fukushima efforts.

Biosketch
Sonja Schmid is an associate professor in the Department of Science, Technology, and Society (STS) at Virginia Tech’s Northern Virginia campus. She teaches courses in social studies of technology, science and technology policy, socio-cultural studies of risk, energy policy, and nuclear nonproliferation. For her first book, Producing Power: The Pre-Chernobyl History of the Soviet Nuclear Industry (MIT Press 2015), she studied the history and organization of the emerging nuclear power sector in the former USSR, relying on archival documents and interviews with veterans of the Soviet industry. In other work, she has traced Soviet nuclear technology transfer to Central and East European nations to explore the fate of Soviet-designed nuclear artifacts once their host nations joined the European Union. Her current research project, which is supported by an NSF CAREER Award, focuses on the challenges of globalizing nuclear emergency response.