

The Guilty Environmentalist

Nuclear Power According to the Simpsons

“Welcome to the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant, a wholly owned subsidiary of Burns Worldwide Industries (except for the facilities covered by our worthless employee stock option plan to placate the drones). I am your tour guide, Smithers, and let me be the first to say I think we all owe a debt of thanks to our great leader and president C. Montgomery Burns for allowing you past the attack dogs, security guards and surveillance cameras today.

“I hope you all still have the handy and informative guide pamphlets you were issued when you passed the strip search. I’ll call your attention to the welcoming address from Mr. Burns because he tells the story of the Springfield Nuclear Plant much better than I. Go ahead, sir.

‘It began years ago as a simple dream—the dream of a humble man possessed only of a vast parcel of undeveloped real estate, several million dollars, and a burning desire for a tax-advantaged investment opportunity.’

“Thank you, Mister Burns. Isn’t he remarkable? We’ll begin the tour right here at the employee’s parking lot and U-238 fuel-rod storage shed. Now, many people ask if there is any danger from exposure to fissionable materials during the tour. Let me assure you there’s nothing to worry about; any genetic mutations would only appear in offspring. Your average exposure will be equal to an average X-ray given once every 30 seconds for 19 years.

“Here at the Springfield Power Plant, we use fission energy—the Good Old-Fashioned Kind—to produce the electricity you squander at home. In fission, we break apart big uranium atoms into smaller atoms. Then we put those smaller atoms into 55-gallon drums and bury them underground where no one will find them.

“You may have heard a lot about fusion—what we call the Bad Kind—where they jam two small hydrogen atoms and make one bigger helium atom. People don’t realize that releasing all those helium atoms into the atmosphere will lead to a tragic future where everyone talks like a cartoon character. Later on we’ll discuss various alternative energy sources like wind, solar and geothermal, and tell you why they are a waste of money.

“During your visit we ask that you do not steal any fissionable material. If you take any of what you see lying around there will not be enough left for our Monitored Employee Theft Program, and your power rates will go up.

“Please do not stray from the tour group or enter into restricted areas. Deaths and injuries decrease plant efficiency and must be reported to federal authorities if your body is found. Please

The Guilty Environmentalist

do not talk with employees and don't believe anything you hear them say. If, however, you see any misbehavior or negligence, please report it. We will reward you with a framed copy of the employee's pink slip.

"The Fissionator 1952 Nuclear Reactor is housed in this building, there to the right. We used to take the tours through the main reactor, but our insurance company now forbids that. Instead, follow me through the control room to the very nerve center of our plant. When employees are present, it can be quite a bustling place.

"Oh, I see there is an employee here. You there, Simpson, wake up. This is Homer Simpson, our chief safety inspector. Mister Burns likes to call our employees 'a bunch of doughnut-eating goof-offs,' and there's no better example than Homer Simpson.

"You might recall he was the Employee of the Month last September when he inadvertently caused and then prevented a nuclear catastrophe.

"By the way, you can purchase a T-shirt that says 'I Survived the Springfield Meltdown Scare' at our lovely gift shop on the way out.

"For real aficionados of near-disaster, we have a limited-edition surveillance video of Homer in the control room during the crisis. My personal favorite is the part when he tries to find out how to override the reactor's computer by reading the owner's manual. Imagine. He gets off a great line: 'Who would have thought a nuclear reactor could be so complicated?'

"It's all right Simpson, you can go back to sleep now.

"A lot of people ask how much it costs to run a nuclear plant, and I can tell you what the answer is. Not nearly enough. In order to maintain the highest-quality executive corps, we pay top dollar and some pretty handsome fringe benefits to everyone from the CEO level on up. When those silly German investors tried to buy the plant for a piddling \$100 million, they soon found out how much more it would take to keep a power plant up to code. They wouldn't pay that much either, so they sold the plant back to Mr. Burns, who wisely cancelled all repairs.

"I clearly remember the Germans' reaction when they finally realized their own technological limitations after being confronted with our sophisticated American hardware. 'Who would have thought a nuclear plant could be such a death trap?' Did you like my German accent? They were clearly overwhelmed. Besides, they had no experience in the disposal of toxic materials in the dead of night. Well, there's another reason we won the Cold War.

"Are there any questions? No. Good. That's the end of this tour. You have been a perfect group, and I want to thank you for visiting us here at the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant. I hope you

The Guilty Environmentalist

will remember delinquent nonpayment of utility bills may be considered a misdemeanor and may result in termination of service, garnishment of wages, property liens, automobile repossession, mortgage foreclosures, and prison sentences. The take-home message is: Pay your electric bill on time, or else. Good day.”

Editor's Note: Much of the above was appropriated directly from "The Simpsons" television series, created by Matt Groening, and Simpsons Illustrated magazine, Summer 1991 issue. The Simpsons are an official trademark of 20th Century Fox Film Corporation.

April 3, 1993