

2016 PSR Maine Position Paper on Nuclear Weapons

“The human race cannot coexist with nuclear weapons.”

Ichiro Itoh, 1945-2007, former mayor of Nagasaki

The nuclear weapons danger is real and growing. Nuclear terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and the thousands of weapons still on hair-trigger alert in the United States and Russia put the planet at risk. Fortunately, there also are new opportunities to eliminate this threat.

With over 15,000 nuclear weapons in nine countries¹, the world is not safe. There is no way to sugar-coat the horrors that follow a nuclear detonation. Even a limited nuclear strike would throw an entire region, like the Middle East for example, into a downward spiral, with no way to medically treat the hundreds of thousands of people affected by such an event. Worse still, as documented in a recent paper published by PSR and International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War, the likely impact of a limited nuclear war between Pakistan and India would have catastrophic impacts on climate, global food production, in turn causing massive economic and societal disruption, and putting the entire world’s population at grave risk.

Short of a nuclear strike, there is great risk for a disastrous accident involving nuclear weapons systems. Human beings and engineered devices can never be 100% perfect 100% of the time. Since 1950 there have been 32 documented accidents involving nuclear weapons and their highly radioactive components.² The military personnel charged with overseeing these weapons are stressed, overworked, and not properly trained, as came to light in 2014 when 34 missile launch officers were caught cheating on their competency tests.

PSR Maine was founded over 30 years ago at the height of the Cold War. Today another nuclear arms race has begun, with the U.S. and Russia dramatically increasing spending to rebuild their nuclear arsenals. Recently introduced plans call for the U.S. to spend \$1 trillion over the next 30 years to build new cruise missiles, modified gravity bombs, long range bombers, ballistic missile submarines and ICBMs – all designed to carry rebuilt nuclear warheads.

Our work is informed by a number of sources including national PSR, our sister organization IPPNW (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War), and other national and international organizations working on this issue.

PSR Maine is committed to raising awareness about these nuclear weapons issues and advocating for changes to reduce nuclear risks. Our national security mission is focused on educating Maine medical and healthcare professionals, students, citizens and policy makers through our community presentations. Also critical to our work is advocating for public policy changes to protect human health through direct and grassroots lobbying efforts.

¹ World Nuclear Weapon Stockpile, Ploughshares Fund, <http://www.ploughshares.org/world-nuclear-stockpile-report>

² The Atomic Archive, http://www.atomicarchive.com/Almanac/Brokenarrows_static.shtml