MORE SLEEP FOR TEENS?

The sky is pitch-black at a school-bus stop in Olney, Maryland, but it might as well be midnight for 15-year-old Joe Palmer. His eyes are open, but his brain feels stalled. He wishes he were still in bed. It is 6:30 a.m., with sunrise still an hour away.

"I’m pretty much a zombie," he says as his bus pulls up. He drags himself aboard, bound for Sherwood High School.

The teen’s lament is familiar across Montgomery County, where the opening bell of high school rings at 7:25. But such travails have taken on more urgency in recent weeks, propelling a burgeoning effort to change the hours of the high school day. The goal: a start time of 8:15 or later.

Supporters say a growing body of sleep research shows that teens are biologically wired for later bedtimes and later wake-ups. And studies show that lack of sleep is linked to lower academic performance, absenteeism, and an increased risk of depression and car crashes.

Other students nap after school. They ask parents for rides, rather than take the bus, so they can sleep in as long as possible. One teen says being tired is one of the most discussed topics of every school day.

In Montgomery, the recent effort was started by Mandi Mader, a mother of two and a psychotherapist who found that a lack of sleep exacerbated the problems of her adolescent patients. Soon, she and others formed a Montgomery chapter of the national group Start School Later. The group is pressing the issue as a public-health concern – comparable to seat-belt use or secondhand smoke – and is seeking change through federal legislation or regulations. The petition is to be presented to the school board this month.

But not everyone is persuaded of the need. Some suggest that tired teens should just get to bed earlier – and stop their late-night texting and messaging on Facebook and Twitter.

However, experts say an hour of sleep a night does make a difference. For Joe Palmer, school-day wake-up starts at 5:30 a.m. in his Olney home. Often, his mother wakes him and makes him sit up, only to return and find him sleeping with no memory that she ever came into his room. His twin sister, Fiona, carries a favorite pillow onto her bus so she can grab 40 minutes of slumber en route to Gaithersburg High School.

For Joe, the bottom line is simple: "I need more sleep."

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(459 words)
The so-called ‘stress tests’ on nuclear power plants in the European Union (EU) have confirmed environmental and energy activists’ worst fears: most European nuclear facilities do not meet minimum security standards.

The tests on 133 nuclear reactors operating in 14 EU member states were carried out in response to widespread concern among the public that an accident similar to the catastrophic meltdown of Japan’s Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power reactor in March 2011 could occur in Europe. According to the report, “EU citizens must... be confident that Europe’s nuclear industry is safe.”

But the findings of the report, released in Brussels on Oct. 4, suggest that, contrary to feeling safe, EU citizens have good reason to be afraid.

Only four countries “currently operate additional safety systems independent of the normal safety systems, located in areas well protected against external events.”

Only seven countries are in possession of “mobile equipment, especially diesel generators needed in case of total loss of power, external events or severe accident situations.”

The catastrophe of Fukushima, deemed the worst nuclear accident since the Chernobyl disaster of 1986, demonstrated that nuclear power plants must be protected even against accidents that have been deemed ‘highly improbable’.

The EU stress tests only confirmed what environmental groups and anti-nuclear power activists have feared for years. Now, these groups are using the results of the tests to call for a gradual phasing out of nuclear power across the continent.

The results of the tests should lead to the immediate shutting down of all nuclear power plants situated in border regions, where nuclear accidents will not only impact the local environment and population but foreign regions and citizens as well.

Such measures would affect nuclear power plants in Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, the Slovak Republic, and Romania.

The stress tests also shed light on just how expensive nuclear power plants can be. The EU assures that “All participating countries have begun to take operational steps to improve the safety of their plants”, adding that “the costs of additional safety improvements are estimated to be in the range of 30 million to 200 million (euros) per reactor unit. Experts like Jo Leinen, a member of European Parliament, believe the money can be put to better use.

“Either the EU and its member states invest in upgrading the nuclear power plants to make them safer, or they shut them down,” he told IPS. “If the upgrading actually costs 25 billion (euros), such a sum (could) be better invested in renewable energy sources.”

Now, the EU stress tests have added yet another nail in the coffin of nuclear power.

The growing global share of renewable energy sources shows that a world free of nuclear power is possible and feasible.

Adapted from ipsnews.net
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PEDIATRICIANs ARE STARTING TO SOUND ALARM BELLS ABOUT BOYS WHO TAKE UNHEALTHY MEASURES TO TRY TO ACHIEVE MUSCULAR BODIES THAT ONLY GENETICS CAN TRULY CONFIR. WHETHER IT IS LONG HOURS IN THE GYM, MONEY BLOWN ON EXPENSIVE SUPPLEMENTS OR EVEN RISKY EXPERIMENTS WITH ILLEGAL STEROIDS, THE PRICE AMERICAN BOYS ARE WILLING TO PAY FOR THE PERFECT BODY APPEARS TO BE ON THE RISE.

ACCORDING TO A RECENT STUDY PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL PEDIATRICS, MORE THAN 40 PERCENT OF BOYS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL SAID THEY REGULARLY EXERCISED WITH THE GOAL OF INCREASING MUSCLE MASS. THIRTY-EIGHT PERCENT SAID THEY USED PROTEIN SUPPLEMENTS, AND NEARLY 6 PERCENT SAID THEY HAD EXPERIMENTED WITH STEROIDS.

"THERE HAS BEEN A STRIKING CHANGE IN ATTITUDES TOWARD MALE BODY IMAGE IN THE LAST 30 YEARS," SAID DR. HARRISON PAPe, A PSYCHIATRY PROFESSOR AT HARVARD WHO STUDIES BODYBUILDING CULTURE. THE PORTRAYAL OF MEN AS FAT-FREE "IS DRAMATICALLY MORE PREVALENT IN SOCIETY THAN IT WAS A GENERATION AGO," HE SAID.

While college-age men have long been interested in bodybuilding, pediatricians say they have been surprised to find that now even middle school boys are so absorbed with building muscles. And their youth adds an element of risk.

Just as girls who count every calorie in an effort to be thin may do themselves more harm than good, boys who chase an illusory image of manhood may end up stunting their development, doctors say, particularly when they turn to supplements — or, worse, steroids — to supercharge their results.

"THE PROBLEM WITH SUPPLEMENTS IS THEY’RE NOT REGULATED LIKE DRUGS, SO IT’S VERY HARD TO KNOW WHAT’S IN THEM," SAID DR. BHASIN, A PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE. "SOME CONTAIN ANABOLIC STEROIDS, AND EVEN HIGH-QUALITY PROTEIN SUPPLEMENTS MIGHT BE DANGEROUS IN LARGE AMOUNTS, OR IF TAKEN TO REPLACE MEALS. THESE THINGS JUST HAVEN’T BEEN STUDIED VERY WELL," HE SAID.

He added that anabolic steroids pose a special danger to developing bodies. Steroids stop testosterone production in men leading to terrible problems when still-growing boys try to stop taking them. Still, the constant association of steroids with elite athletes like Lance Armstrong perpetuates the notion that they can be managed successfully.

Online, in bodybuilding forums for teenagers, boys barely out of puberty share weight-lifting regimens and body fat percentages, and judge one another’s progress.

"THEY ASK US ABOUT EVERYTHING," SAID PETER RIVERA, A HIGH SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER. "HOW DO I LOSE WEIGHT? HOW DO I GAIN MUSCLE? HOW MANY TIMES A WEEK SHOULD I WORK OUT?" Mr Rivera explained that some boys want to be stronger for sports, but others want to change their body type.