

SAY WHAT T

FULL SPEED AHEAD, MR. PARKER, FULL SPEED AHEAD!

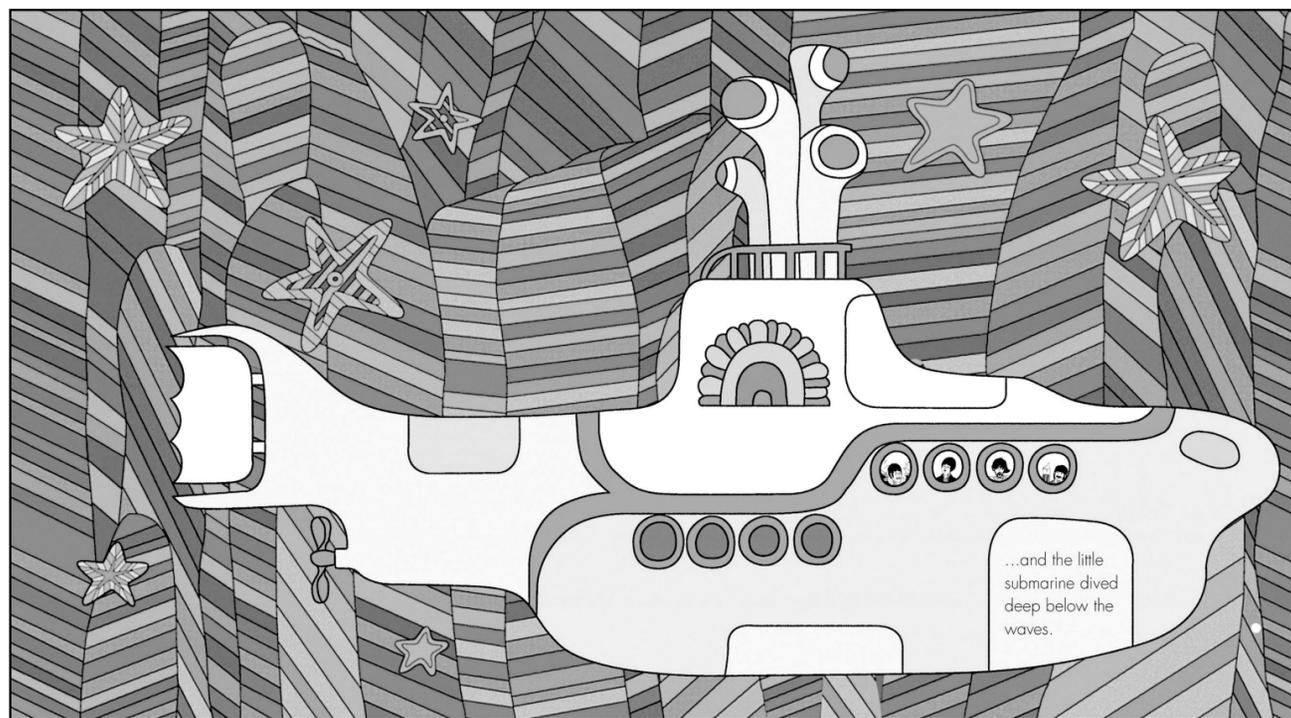


Photo by Subafilms Ltd.
Much like the famous art from the Beatles' "Yellow Submarine," the radioactive gauge lost between Pennsylvania and West Virginia was bold and obvious. This photo, taken from an exclusive "Yellow Submarine" book available for iPad and iPhone users, has become an iconic part of Beatles history.

RADIATION SAFETY, STEP 1:

SHUT THE TAILGATE

BY SUZIE GILBERT

Citizens! It is safe to come out now. The missing radioactive gauge has been found, and the slippery-fingered company responsible will be held accountable.

Or not.
On May 3 a Franklin County quarry company lost a radioactive portable gauge somewhere between Pennsylvania and West Virginia. How did it lose the thing?

It fell off the back of a truck.

Last September Halliburton lost a radioactive fracking rod somewhere between Pecos and Odessa, Texas. How?

It fell off the back of a truck.

Don't they make tailgates anymore?

The Chambersburg-based Valley Quarries provides materials for heavy construction and commercial projects including blacktop, concrete, stone, sand and paving. It is licensed to possess and use the portable gauge – actually called a “nuclear density gauge” – to measure the inner structure of its materials.

But it contains radioactive stuff, so if it falls off the back of a truck, it becomes a problem.

The gauge was missing for 10 days. Eventually it was found lounging alongside a West Virginia road, minding its own business, by a good

Of course, the rod is silver/grey and only seven inches long, while the gauge is almost two feet tall, weighs 30 pounds and looks like a square yellow submarine with a raised periscope. But that doesn't let Halliburton off the hook, because it has more employees, plus both the FBI and the Texas National Guard were helping to look.

Samaritan who collared it and took it to the Department of Environmental Protection.

Can't we microchip these things?

It took nearly a month before the radioactive rod was found by one of Halliburton's own employees. Of course, the rod is silver/grey and only seven inches long, while the gauge is almost two feet tall, weighs 30 pounds and looks like a square yellow submarine with a raised periscope.

But that doesn't let Halliburton off the hook because it has more employees, plus both the FBI and the Texas National Guard were helping to look.

Every state has its own website describing safety measures when it comes to radioactive instruments. Most deal with leak tests, proper maintenance, operating and emergency procedures, inventories and disposal. Not many specifically mention radioactive equipment falling off a truck, although North

Dakota's does say that during transport, gauges should be locked in the trunk of a vehicle, hidden from view, and/or secured by lock and chain while in a vehicle with an open bed.

Pennsylvania offers a Gauge Safety Certification Class; upon completion, one part of the graduates' skill set is to “load and secure a gauge inside a vehicle.” It seems as though one might not need extensive training for this, but then: “Each year there are many incidents involving portable gauges at construction sites, most commonly heavy machinery running over them.”

This is not good. Every industry suffers from human error; it's just the nature of the beast.

However, an employee misplacing a file, even an important one, doesn't evoke the same type of alarm response as one flattening a radioactive gauge with a dump truck or allowing a radioactive rod to

fall out onto a highway.

Are these workers not being paid enough? Does working around radioactive material make one cavalier?

“We can say that we consider the loss of NRC-regulated nuclear material to be a significant regulatory and security concern,” said NRC spokesman Neil Sheehan. “We have taken enforcement action in the past when nuclear gauges have been lost, even if only temporarily.”

Strangely enough, no enforcement action was taken against Halliburton for its disappearing rod. So if Valley Quarries is prosecuted, it means there is one set of rules for a company that is huge and politically connected and another for one that is small and regular-Joe. Surely that couldn't happen in America.

In any case, neither the rod nor the staff of either company comforts me. “It fell off the back of a truck” is supposed to be why your neighbor is sporting a new dining room set, not why the local highway is littered with radioactive debris.

Suzie Gilbert, a writer for Shalereporter.com, is a state and federally licensed wild bird rehabilitator, and is the founder of Flyaway Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and release of injured and orphaned wild birds.

YOU TELL US.

Not the right time for corporate tax bill

This month many school boards are deciding which programs to cut and how many staffers to lay off. In Harrisburg, lawmakers may make matters worse with sweeping new tax cuts for profitable corporations.

The House adopted a bill that supporters say closes loopholes. House Bill 440 takes the easy way out. It does little to close tax loopholes, leaving the rest of us paying more – including businesses that focus on their customers rather than tax avoidance schemes.

The bill is now before the Senate. If passed, it will give away \$7 in new tax cuts for every \$1 it brings in, once it is fully implemented. That means less for our children's education, roads and bridges and health care.

We all want a stronger economy, but after 10 years of cutting corporate taxes, our unemployment rate is above the national average and has been since last fall. State funding cuts over the past two years have cost 20,000 teachers, language specialists, counselors and other jobs in public schools.

Pennsylvania needs real tax reform that levels the playing field for all businesses without undermining our future or shifting more costs onto property taxpayers.

SHARON WARD

Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center

Support appreciated

The agricultural science students of Blackhawk would like to thank the Blackhawk community for coming out in support of the program on April 11 and 18. The students were unsuccessful in getting it reinstated, but not for lack of trying.

The students in their efforts for reinstatement made signs, went door to door, got sponsors, did a presentation, sent letters to the editor, made a music video called “Save Ag Baby” that can be viewed on YouTube, and were interviewed at WBVP-WMBA Radio. It is sad to report that on April 18 the board failed for the second time to reinstate the AG-Science program.

Penn State Agriculture Department faculty and Chris Weller from the Department of Education contacted Superintendent Michelle Miller to offer insight into new updates to the AG-Science curriculum and available teaching graduates, to no avail. Unfortunately, AG-Science was never treated as a true science course at Blackhawk, it was only a credit class.

LAURA KYLE

South Beaver Twp.

End Christian bashing

When the young woman attending CMU paraded around as the Pope butt naked from the waist down, I thought her parents and the school would be aghast.

Obviously, I was mistaken because Christian bashing seems to be very popular these days. If the costume was of Mohammed, I wonder what the reaction would have been.

College alumni are encouraged to support their alma maters. If CMU alumni continue financial contributions and express no outrage about this incident, we must assume they fully support the direction chosen by the university.

Parents of potential future CMU students may want to consider sending their children and tuition to another school with a different direction.

ROY J. WHIPPLE

Freedom

“JUSTIN BIEBER RECEIVED MULTIPLE HONORS AT THE BILLBOARD MUSIC AWARDS. HE WON FOR BEST MALE ARTIST. I CAN COUNT THREE LIES IN THE TITLE OF THAT AWARD.”

— Late-night host Jimmy Kimmel



Justin Bieber >>>
AP photo