

Attorney: Long sentences could be ahead for trespassing peace activists

Patrick O'Neill | Jan. 24, 2014

The lead defense attorney for an 83-year-old nun convicted of damaging government property said the U.S. attorney in the case will ask the judge to impose long prison sentences on Sr. Megan Rice and two others slated to be sentenced in federal court next week.

Bill Quigley said federal guidelines for the three suggest five to seven years in prison for Rice, six to eight years for Greg Boertje-Obed and seven to nine years for Michael Walli. The three, known as the Transform Now Plowshares, broke into the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tenn., on July 28, 2012.

Rice, a member of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus, used bolt cutters, a Google map and Boertje-Obed and Walli to clear a path through the darkness to access the Highly Enriched Uranium Materials Facility, which contains a stockpile of weapons-grade uranium. Once inside the facility, the three chipped the building's structure with hammers and sprayed "biblical graffiti" before lighting candles and awaiting arrest. [They were convicted of sabotage](#) [1] at their May trial in Knoxville. The maximum sentence for each defendant is 30 years.

In an email to *NCR*, Quigley wrote: "The government is urging the judge to stay with these (guidelines) at minimum."

Quigley said Federal Judge Amul R. Thapar, who presided over the trial, does not have to follow the guidelines.

"(Thapar) has broad discretion, there is no mandatory minimum," Quigley wrote.

The break-in led to an overhaul of security at the Y-12 plant. The Transform Now Plowshares defendants said they selected Y-12 as the site of their action because of ongoing production of nuclear weapons there and the Department of Energy's plan to build a Uranium Processing Facility, which [could cost up to \\$11.6 billion](#) [2], at Y-12 to continue nuclear weapons production.

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