Preface

This document was originally conceived as a compilation of activities at Argonne National Laboratory that were directed toward the study of radium in humans. However, it soon became obvious that this was a very limited approach, because such a compilation would include no background on the widespread uses of radium in industry and in the medical profession, nor would it address the early history of the discovery of the hazards of radium. Such an approach would also ignore contributions to the study of radium effects made at other laboratories. This document now addresses these topics, quite briefly to be sure, in order to give an overall picture of what might be called the radium era, that period from the early part of this century, when radium was rapidly exploited as a tool and a medication, to the present time, when radium is not generally used and the study of its effects has been terminated.

This history was initiated with the approval of the U.S. Department of Energy in January 1988, but it was supported only sporadically until Dr. Robert G. Thomas became manager of the radium studies program at Argonne in 1991. With his support I was able to complete the first draft of the manuscript by the time the program was terminated at the end of September 1993. Discussions of a few papers presented at an international seminar in April 1994 were added subsequently.

Unfortunately, size and time limitations required that much be omitted from this document. The contributions of many individuals involved have not been addressed, and many productive avenues of research have not been mentioned. My intention has been to include sufficient references to guide the interested reader to additional studies on the radium cases. The text mentions the series of annual reports produced by the short-lived New Jersey Radium Research Project. Readers should be aware that both at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at Argonne National Laboratory semiannual or annual reports were produced every year. These reports contain a very large body of information on the respective radium studies.

The subjects covered in this text and those omitted reflect the interests and biases of the author. No doubt other writers would have included a different set of items. The author's hope is that the variety of subjects presented is sufficient to whet the interests of readers who are unfamiliar with the history and consequences of the uses and abuses of radium in this country.