

SUPPLEMENTARY TESTIMONY OF PROFESSOR MERRIL EISENBUD ON FEBRUARY
24 1994 TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES.

I wish to place into the record my response to comments that have been made about a statement contained in an unedited transcript of a meeting of the Atomic Energy Commission Advisory Committee on Biology and Medicine in January 1956. I had long ago forgotten about the meeting, and had never seen the transcript until about four years ago when four of the 327 page record was made public by a Washington representative of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Since that time it has been quoted in the media on a number of occasions, and has been the subject of inquiries I have received from reporters during the past few days.

In one page I mentioned experiments that were then being planned for the Atoll of Utirik in the Marshall Islands. These experiments did not involve studies of the effects of the fallout on the health of the residents. We wanted to study the relationships between the amounts of fallout on the ground, the amount that is absorbed into food, and how that correlates to the amounts excreted in urine. This is the kind of data that is essential for purposes of risk assessment and by January 1956 was already being gathered in many parts of the world, including many places in the United States. The United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, which was just being organized, placed great emphasis on the need for such data.

The same quotation also made it seem that I was guilty of a cavalier reference to the advantages of data obtained from Marshall Island residents, compared to mice. I have my own brief notes of the meeting, which indicate that there had been mention of laboratory mouse experiments then underway in an AEC Laboratory. However, the experiments did not involve fallout or the Marshall Islands in any way. Discussion of the mouse experiments was not on the agenda of the Advisory Committee meeting, but might have taken place took place during a coffee break or at lunch. The statement as it appears in the transcript makes no sense, and is somehow out of context. The exact wording of the transcript suggests that I referred to the mice involved in a specific experimental context, and not in a generic sense.

After nearly forty years I have no way of knowing how to explain what appears in the transcript. However, I can appreciate why the reported statement, although out of context, may nevertheless have offended the people of the Marshall Islands. I regret that misunderstanding, and I apologize to them for my role in it.