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# Documents on radiation tests idle for a year

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Special to the Herald

WASHINGTON — Reports on radiation experiments that the government conducted on civilian prisoners, Air Force personnel and workers at the Hanford Reservation sat stacked in a House subcommittee's document rooms for a year while staff members devoted themselves to other matters.

Only after the prodding of Rep. Edward J. Markey, D-Mass., who became chairman of the House Subcommittee on Energy Conservation and Power last year, did staffers move to study the documents.

The subcommittee, reacting to public concern over the effects of radiation on human health, will make a report on the experiments public in a few weeks ... or a few months. Neither staff members nor congressional aides familiar with the investigation would give a more definite answer.

Phil Keif, a public affairs specialist with the Department of Energy, said he believes the DOE submitted its final report on the experiments to the subcommittee in September of 1984. One source, who requested anonymity, said the reports were so extensive it required two years to review them.

Raoul Rosenberg, press secretary to Markey, would not comment on the findings.

In its activity report published last April, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, the parent to Markey's subcommittee, said it was conducting an ongoing investigation of the experiments.

The experiments were conducted by agencies preceding the DOE, including the Defense Nuclear Agency and the Atomic Energy Commission. One group of experiments was conducted in 1956 over two atolls in the Pacific Ocean. Air Force personnel rode in B-57 airplanes that were repeatedly flown through highly radioactive mushroom clouds from atomic bomb

blasts "for the principal purpose of measuring radiation doses in the clouds and to the crews," the report said.

The doses of radiation they received in those experiments, as part of a series of 17 nuclear tests in the Pacific that year, were equivalent to the doses they'd have received from 1,000 chest X-rays, according to the activity report.

The Air Force had already sent "robots" into the mushroom clouds and measured the doses of radiation they received. The flight crews may have been exposed for no reason, the report said.

The report on those experiments was made public in November of 1985, as part of a report by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

One source close to the House subcommittee said its report will cover about 30 radiation experiments on humans by the government. Another source put that figure in the hundreds. The experiments were conducted between the mid-1940s and early 1970s, Rosenberg said. He thinks most of those reports have remained closed to the public.

The experiments included injecting volunteers from some Washington and Oregon state prisons with radioactive isotopes. Some Hanford workers and military personnel were exposed to radiation in many forms and on many parts of their body. Some had their testicles irradiated and then willfully received vasectomies.

The studies were considered by some officials to be urgent to determine how soldiers would function in the event of nuclear war, or how astronauts would respond to radiation from the atmosphere.

Some of the subjects treated were victims of cancer. All knew they were receiving radiation, spokesmen said.

In addition to its own investigation, the subcommittee has requested a report on the matter from the General Accounting Office.

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