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Inmates were guinea pigs for X-ray tests

U.S. funded experiments

by Elouise Schumacher
Times staff reporter

RICHLAND — Hundreds of people were intentionally exposed to radiation over a 20-year period so that scientists could study the effect of radiation on reproductive organs, the Department of Energy has disclosed.

In many of the federally funded experiments, the testicles of men — some of them volunteers from Washington and Oregon state prisons — were exposed to X-ray radiation, documents released by the DOE show.

And in one experiment at the Argonne Cancer Research Hospital near Chicago, a division of the Argonne National Laboratory, a woman who was 10 weeks pregnant was given radioactive materials in a study of "physiology and metabolism." The woman aborted her fetus six days later because of severe sickle-cell anemia, the documents said.

Experiments involving prison inmates from Washington and Oregon were conducted during the 1960s and '70s by researchers at the University of Washington and the Pacific Northwest Research Foundation in Seattle.

Mike Lawrence, Hanford operations manager for the DOE, defended the tests yesterday, saying they were done to gather needed information on the effects of radiation and were similar to hospital medical experiments. He said the documents were given to Congress two years ago, and added no human experiments are currently funded by DOE.

The DOE disclosed the experiments during the first day of a week-long meeting of experts from the Centers for Disease Control, called to determine what health studies should be performed in light of disclosures earlier this year of massive releases of radioactivity at Hanford.

The human experiments, performed under more than 20 separate studies, were paid for by the DOE and its predecessor agencies, the Atomic Energy Commission and the Energy Research and Development Administration.

The experiments on 64 volunteers at the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla were conducted between 1963 and 1973, the DOE said. The prisoners were exposed to numerous X-rays to determine effects of radiation on reproductive organs.

The Walla Walla test was conducted by the University of Washington with AEC funding, the documents reveal. Also, the Pacific Northwest Research Foundation in Seattle similarly tested 67 inmates at the Oregon State Prison between 1963 and 1971.

The government documents provided these de-

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scriptions of some of the experiments:

■ From June 1, 1963, to Feb. 1, 1973, 64 volunteers at the Washington State Prison were exposed to X-ray radiation ranging from 7.5 to 44 rad (a rad is a standard measure of radiation). Researchers found that temporary sterility resulted.

■ From Aug. 22, 1963, to May 6, 1971, 67 volunteers at the Oregon State Prison were subjected to between 8 and 600 rads of X-ray radiation.

The documents referring to the experiment on Washington inmates said the "subjects were informed in detail regarding the study and signed consent forms were obtained from subjects and from spouses if subjects were married."

The subjects also agreed to undergo vasectomies, although some later changed their minds.

SOLDIERS EXPOSED

■ Veterans who were stationed at Hanford during the 1940s and '50s say they are dying of cancer caused by radioactive releases.

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