

Hanford panel wants answers

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Health group recommends preliminary health study of 'Downwinders'

By Lonnie Rosenwald
Staff writer

RICHLAND — A panel of health and environmental experts will recommend further study of suspected illness caused by releases of radiation from Hanford Nuclear Reservation in the 1940s and 1950s.

The group, in a report today to the state Nuclear Waste Board, will stop short of calling for a major health study.

Panel Chairman Glyn Caldwell said Thursday that panel members were concerned about massive experimental releases of Iodine-131 from the nuclear reservation during the late 1940s and early 1950s. The releases were disclosed by the U.S. Department of Energy in February.

"The panel considered these are quite high and serious enough to be concerned about," said Caldwell, assistant director of the Arizona Department of Health Services and a cancer epidemiologist.

Referring to a single release of 340,000 curies of iodine, Caldwell said. "That's the largest exposure I've ever encountered in this sort of circumstance."

Allen Conklin of the state Office of Radiation Protection told reporters this week. "If that happened today, we'd call out the National Guard."

Hanford, at the time, did not inform the public.

A study released Monday by the Office of Radiation Protection estimated infants living in Pasco in 1945 could have received as much as 2,295 rems of iodine that year. An infant in Spokane could have received 256 rems, the study said.

In comparison, an X-ray delivers a dose of

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about 25 millirems. A millirem is .001 of a rem.

The study said a Pasco adult could have absorbed 476 rems, and a Spokane adult up to 53 rems.

The 13-member health panel was convened by the federal Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, at the request of the Nuclear Waste Board. The board was responding to concerns of residents who live downwind of Hanford and claim a higher than normal incidence of cancer.

The U.S. Department of Energy, which runs Hanford, contends its studies of Hanford workers show no unusual health problems. No study has been done of nearby residents, however.

The panel approved resolutions Thursday night calling for consideration of a general health study.

In the meantime, it agreed "the highest priority" should be developing a system to determine the rate of thyroid disease among nearby residents. Iodine collects in the thyroid and may cause cancer.

Iodine reaches the thyroid through milk produced by cows that graze on contaminated grass.

The panel didn't say how the study should be conducted, by whom or what it could cost.

The health panel also agreed to recommend a "health surveillance system" be created in Washington, Oregon and Idaho to collect information from hospital discharge records, tumor registries, health insurance records and other sources to monitor health effects of Hanford.

It also will recommend the DOE expand its existing studies of Hanford workers to include military and construction workers. It will suggest DOE develop a system to track workers' health after they leave the site.

Caldwell said the panel decided not to recommend the state seek a full health study until it determines whether enough information would be available to make a study worthwhile.

"You want to see if you can do anything before you line up all the money," he said.

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COLLECTION MRRKEY FILES

BOX No. 2 of 6

REPOSITORY DOE - FORESTAL

FOLDER TESTICULAR FS-1