

Washington Merry-Go-Round

Low-level radiation menaces public

By Jack Anderson

WASHINGTON — We began reporting a year ago that the 1957 "Big Smoky" atomic bomb test had left some invisible injuries. The military volunteers, who survived the test seemingly unscathed, are now in danger of dying from leukemia. They are victims of low-level radiation.

But nuclear tests aren't the only source of this insidious menace. We have also reported that some nuclear facilities have been bombarding the public with low doses of radiation for years. Unsuspecting workers and neighbors may be in the same danger as the survivors of Big Smoky.

This disturbing subject was discussed recently behind closed White House doors. Defense Secretary Harold Brown reported to President Carter that the "whole series of tests in the 1950s in Nevada are now getting attention because of the alleged after-effects."

Brown explained that he personally had attended some of the nuclear tests while director of the Livermore Laboratories. He assured the president that he had always worn a radiation badge and "at least one member of each group in an area" was supposed to have one.

The Health, Education and Welfare Secretary Joseph Califano interrupted with his own report. According to the confidential minutes, Califano informed the president that the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta "is concerned that the incidence of leukemia in connection with these tests may indicate that more cancers result from low levels of radiation than previously thought."

The publicity over Big Smoky has stimulated a flood of letters and phone calls to the Pentagon from servicemen who participated in nuclear tests in Nevada and the South Pacific. Hundreds of them have reported they are suffering from leukemia and other maladies.

This does not mean, of course, that

their diseases were caused by radiation exposure. But the Pentagon is busily pulling together the names of 200,000 to 300,000 military personnel who are believed to have participated in 190 atmospheric tests between 1946 and 1962. A spokesman promised to "fulfill the government's responsibility to the people involved."

In contrast, the Energy Department has joined the nuclear industry in hushing up the disagreeable information about the low-level radiation that emanates from peaceful nuclear facilities.

University of Pittsburgh Prof. Thomas F. Mancuso spent more than 11 years on an epidemiological study of atomic workers at the government's Hanford, Wash., plant.

His findings turned out to be the opposite of what the Energy Department had hoped. His superiors had encouraged him to debunk the research of another scientist who found inexplicable cancer increases among Hanford workers. Instead, Mancuso confirmed these findings.

The professor was ordered to turn over his data to scientists at the government-controlled laboratories in

Oak Ridge, Tenn., and the government-contracted Battelle Pacific Northwest Labs in Richland, Wash. None of these scientists had ever conducted a human epidemiological study.

At Battelle, the study was assigned to Dr. Ethel Gilbert whose preliminary analysis was so obtuse that associates complained they "couldn't make heads or tails of it."

At Oak Ridge, the government hired Dr. Edythelena Tompkins to make an "objective analysis" of the Mancuso data. She has a reputation as an apologist for the nuclear industry. Her husband, Dr. Paul Tompkins, headed the Federal Radiation Council in the 1960s when it raised permissible radiation dose levels for the general population by 20 times.

Dr. Edythelena Tompkins told our associate Howard Rosenberg that she still believes low levels of radiation not only are harmless but, in fact, "stimulate the body's natural repair mechanisms." This should startle the doctors at the Disease Control Center.

United Features Syndicate

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2.3 Mancuso Project

FOLDER (mortality data)

#4 April 1977 - DEC 1978

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