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P R E S S R E L E A S E

About Eighty Thousand Cancers in the United States, More Than 15,000 of Them Fatal, Attributable to Fallout from Worldwide Atmospheric Nuclear Testing

Hot Spots Occurred Thousands of Miles from Testing Areas, Government Study Shows

Independent Institute Calls for Public Health Response, Compensation and a Global Truth Commission

Takoma Park MD, February 28, 2002: An estimated 80,000 people who lived in or were born in the United States between the years 1951 and 2000 will contract cancer as a result of the fallout caused by atmospheric nuclear weapons testing, according to an analysis of government studies by the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research. Well over 15,000 of these cases would be fatal. The most recent government study, a fact sheet, and official fallout maps are posted on the IEER web site. The report and maps are also scheduled to be posted at the Centers for Disease Control web site, www.cdc.gov. The maps show cumulative fallout and county-by-county radiation dose and fallout patterns. These are proxies for geographic patterns of excess cancers that would be attributable to radiation.

The government report, prepared by the National Cancer Institute and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, estimates radiation doses from testing at the Nevada Test Site as well as from testing outside of the continental United States. The latter category includes U.S. tests in the Marshall Islands and Johnston Atoll in the Pacific region, Soviet tests in Semipalatinsk (now in Kazakhstan) and Novaya Zemlya (Russia), and British tests on Christmas Island.

"This report and other official data show that hot spots occurred thousands of miles away from the test sites," said Dr. Arjun Makhijani, president of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research. "Hot spots due to testing in Nevada occurred as far away as New York and Maine. Hot

spots from U.S. Pacific area testing and also Soviet testing were scattered across the United States from California, Oregon, Washington, and in the West to New Hampshire, Vermont and North Carolina in the East."

"Despite that fact that its own studies have long shown extensive harm to people, including children, the U.S. government has had no effective public health response," said Lisa Ledwidge, a biologist and IEER's Outreach Director for the United States. "We applaud the fact that the United States government has been honest enough to say that it has harmed its own people, though it did so only under prolonged pressure from the people and some of its elected representatives. It is the only nuclear-weapon state to have done so. But it is not enough to estimate numbers or say you're sorry. The harm is still occurring. The government needs to inform people fully."

In the 1950s the government informed photographic film producers of expected fallout patterns so they could protect their film supply, but did nothing to inform milk producers so that they could protect a vital component of the food supply. "It is late in the day," said Ms. Ledwidge. "The government should not only urgently formulate a health and compensation response strategy, with public involvement, it should implement it without any further delay."

The study was mandated by Congress through legislation passed in 1998, after a 1997 National Cancer Institute report that dealt with only one radionuclide, iodine-131, and doses to the thyroid alone showed extensive exposures across the United States. Hot spots were scattered across the continent. The most affected counties were as far away as Idaho and Montana.

"The 1997 report indicates that some farm children, those who drank goat's milk in the 1950s in high fallout areas were as severely exposed as the worst exposed children after the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident. Such exposure creates a high probability of a variety of illnesses," said Dr. Makhijani. "Yet the government did nothing to inform the people in these affected areas."

Kenneth Strickler, who was born in 1954 in Challis, Idaho, a high fallout area, and who grew up there, learned in 1998 that he had thyroid cancer after his physician ran some tests. "The government should make the public aware of the symptoms of the types of cancer that might be caused from downwind syndrome," he said. "They should publish an ad in the newspapers so that people can look for more information at their web site."

He suspected that a malfunctioning thyroid might be responsible for his strange metabolic symptoms as a result of information about thyroid radiation doses from fallout given to him by his sister, Nikki Doll. Ms. Doll attended a talk given in 1998 in Challis by Dr. Makhijani as part of a tour organized by the Snake River Alliance.

"It is very frightening to know that radioactive tests were conducted by the United States and other countries with the knowledge that some harm might come to those who lived in the path of fallout," said Ms. Doll. "If the public is made aware of the possible dangers that hide in their environment, they can be alert to the symptoms and seek early diagnosis and treatment of a disease if it strikes. The U.S. government needs to be responsible for its actions and to inform us

about what they did and how it is affecting our lives and how it will continue to affect the lives of those we love."

"Now is the time for people from nuclear weapons states to call for truth from their governments. Right here in Idaho we know the news is grim. There are hot spots all over the inter-mountain West," said Margaret Macdonald Stewart, Development Director of the Snake River Alliance. "Now the job - the U.S. government's job -is to take the news to small towns all over this region and help unsuspecting people whose health has been damaged by nuclear weapons."

"The United States has a compensation program for Nevada Test Site neighbors who are geographical downwinders. But this is clearly not enough," explained Ms. Ledwidge. "There are hot spots thousands of miles from tests sites and the new definition of 'downwinder' should include all of them."

"The new fallout maps and radiation dose estimates show that nuclear weapons states not only harmed their own people but also people in other countries," said Dr. Makhijani. "U.S., Soviet, and other testing likely created hot spots in Canada and Scandinavia, for instance. There may have been hot spots in many other countries all over the world. It is high time for the United Nations to create a Global Truth Commission that would examine in detail comparable to the U.S government studies the harm that has been inflicted upon the people of the world by nuclear weapons production and testing. Nuclear weapons states owe an honest accounting, treatment, and compensation to the victims of the nuclear age."