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PRESS RELEASE

70+ Signers Urge National Academy Panel to Study Genetic and Birth Defects as Radiation Risks

Washington, DC, Sept. 3, 1999: More than 70 organizations and individuals from around the world today called on a new National Academy of Sciences (NAS) panel being set up to study the impacts of low-level radiation exposure to consider a wide range of potential health effects including birth defects and genetic damage in its deliberations. In a letter to the NAS Committee on the Biological Effects of Ionizing Radiation (BEIR VII), the signers said

"It is important that the BEIR VII process address the full range of risks that have not been conclusively evaluated so far. This should include risks that have come to light since the BEIR V report (such as the combined effects of radiation and hormonally-active agents, also called endocrine disrupters) as well as issues that could have been addressed in BEIR V, but were not."

Dr. Arjun Makhijani, president of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research (IEER), handed the letter to the Committee for consideration on behalf of the signatories. "The issue of the health effects of radiation is far more complex than the range of effects evaluated in the last BEIR committee report," said Dr. Arjun Makhijani. "Moreover, some of the data, such as US worker dose data, used in radiation studies is suspect or seriously flawed. It is crucial that the committee consider data integrity and quality questions and not accept results of studies only because they have been published in peer-reviewed journals."

"We have compiled a list of some of the most crucial issues that we believe you should address, like radiation's effects on the development of ova, which are formed once per lifetime during females' fetal development," said Lisa Ledwidge, Outreach Coordinator of IEER. "We also are requesting that the committee publish and update frequently a list of the publications that it is reviewing so that the public may be able to follow the review and add to that list as needed."

The letter makes some highly specific suggestions for research. David Close, a professor of physics at East Tennessee State University who specializes in the effects of radiation on DNA, noted that when radioactive atoms, such as those of carbon-14, become part of the DNA, they

change the chemical composition of that piece of DNA when they decay. "Carbon-14 becomes nitrogen-14 when it decays," said Dr. Close. "We need to know whether the genetic change that results from such a transmutation in the DNA can produce adverse health effects, and if so what these health effects are."

IEER requested that the committee treat the issues in the letter with the same seriousness had a member of the committee raised them.

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