



DOE Openness: Human Radiation Experiments: Roadmap to the Project

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HUMAN RADIATION EXPERIMENTS: The Department of Energy Roadmap to the Story and the Records

United States Department of Energy Assistant Secretary for Environment, Safety, and Health February 1995

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Foreword

On December 7, 1993, U.S. Secretary of Energy Hazel R. O'Leary announced her Openness Initiative; the scope of its ramifications has only begun to become fully apparent in the succeeding year. The determination to conduct the public's business in an open and fully accountable manner has required profound change in an agency whose institutional birth was in the most secret of wartime programs, the Manhattan Project.

Over the past several decades, the American people's trust in our institutions of government has greatly eroded. Many complex factors have contributed to this erosion, not least among them the secrecy associated with our Cold War nuclear competition with the Soviet Union. Without judging the historical necessity of secrecy, and in recognition that even today some activities require national security classification, it is a fact that the ability of the Government to perform its post-Cold War missions is greatly impeded by pervasive public distrust of its motives and competence. The commitment to openness, of which this project is a very visible element, is a deliberate effort to rebuild that basic level of trust

between the American people and their government that is necessary for a democracy to function.

Well over 200 people in Washington, D.C. and around the country have devoted all or most of their time during the past year to the effort to find, declassify if necessary, evaluate, and make publicly accessible and usable the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE's) records related to human experimentation with radiation. This project extends beyond the records of the experiments themselves to include records in the custody of DOE and important private institutions that illuminate the considerations that drove human-subject research. It has called on the expertise of historians, archivists, health professionals, declassifiers, records managers, lawyers, and researchers of various kinds. In addition, the advice and comments of a number of academic and government historians and archivists has been sought and is gratefully acknowledged. While the work is still ongoing, it has reached a stage at which substantial progress can be reported, as it is in the following pages.

It would be unrealistic to imagine that we will ever find every document that bears on the story of human radiation experimentation in which the Manhattan Project, the Atomic Energy Commission, and DOE have been involved, considering that 3.2 million cubic feet of records still survive in dozens of locations from coast to coast, many of which are poorly catalogued, if at all. The goal of this publication is not to have the final word, but to leave behind a roadmap that will enable the public, historians, and policy makers, as well as those who participated in experiments as subject or researcher, to come to a better understanding of this aspect of the history of the atomic age.

For me and those with whom I have been privileged to work, this has been an opportunity to contribute to our country's understanding of its past and transition to its future. My sincere gratitude is extended to all of those who helped, from Washington to Berkeley and many points between.

Ellyn R. Weiss, Director
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