

Fallout Can Hit Friend and Foe With Equal Ease

By VINCENT THOMAS
Assemblyman

The horrors of Hiroshima left an indelible imprint of fear in the mind of every human being who knows the pitiful results of that first use of atomic power by man. For years after that unhappy event our American newspapers and periodicals carried many pictures and stories of the scarred survivors of that holocaust. Since then, frequent experiments with atomic and nuclear weapons have added an even more terrifying element to this basic fear, the dread of radiation "fall-out."

This dread of fall-out is based upon the fact that it is an unseen attacker which can strike friend or foe. Its spread is controlled only by wind and weather. So far, no scientist or physician can predict the type of result to be expected when the human body is invaded by the radioactivity of fall-out; anything from sterility to freakishly abnormal offspring are considered by some to be possible after serious contamination. Others are more cautious, so nothing is certain.

Just this spring, a real alarm was sounded when tests of radioactivity in a Bay Area rainstorm showed is content to be 200 times the maximum believed safe for human drinking water. A few days later, a similar test at Sacramento revealed a radioactive content in a rainstorm there to be more than 12 times normal. These facts alerted the subcommittee on air pollution and radiation protection of the Assembly interim committee on public health.

Meeting in San Francisco last week, the subcommittee heard testimony from a number of scientists, public health experts, air pollution officials and disaster control specialists, as well as from a number of mothers interested in the safety of their children.

University of California geneticists told the legislative group that while there is a slight increase in measurable man-made radiation in the atmosphere, "the risk to human beings is so small that none of us has to worry about it." It was said that of about 200,000 California children born each year, there would be not more than 50 or 60 who would be subject to danger from man-made radiation, and that this would include danger from exposure to X-rays and other peace-time radiating devices.

Spokesmen for public health agencies outlined a long range program of radiation testing of air, water and food samples. Declaring that the need for constant testing was brought "sharply into focus by the radioactive rainfall" of last spring, witnesses told the committee that greatly increased equipment and larger numbers of trained men would be needed for the work.

Evidence presented to the subcommittee sharply pointed up the existing shortcomings in coordination between the state department of public health, the state disaster office, the Federal Atomic Energy Commission, and local agencies concerned. Two suggestions were advanced to remedy the difficulty: first, that one of the governor's secretaries be named to act as coordinator of all radiation testing; and second, that a central laboratory be set up in the public health department. Greater exchange of information between agencies on radiation hazards was declared to be urgently needed.

Based upon the results of this first hearing it seems certain that protection against radiation fall-out will be an important topic for consideration by your legislature at the 1959 session. The investigating subcommittee will hold additional hearings elsewhere in the state this coming fall.

Steel Executive to Talk in Los Angeles

D. B. Greenwood, manager of personnel of the Columbia-Geneva Steel Division of United States Steel Corp., will speak to members of the Suggestion Plans Assn. at the Rodger Young Auditorium, Los Angeles, at a luncheon meeting at 12:15 p.m., Friday.

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