



Powered by Clickability

Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Study: 1950s nuclear fallout worse than thought

TAKOMA PARK, Maryland (CNN) --Radioactive fallout from 1950s above-ground nuclear weapons testing spread farther than researchers previously realized and most increased cancer rates in the United States, according to a scientific report.

"Any person living in the contiguous United States since 1951 has been exposed to radioactive fallout, and all organs and tissues of the body have received some radiation exposure," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Cancer Institute said in a progress report prepared for Congress. The report was reviewed by the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research.

The preliminary report -- the actual study is not yet complete -- has alarmed some members of Congress, including Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa.

"What we know is maybe the tip of the iceberg here," Harkin said. "We know that there's been upwards of perhaps 15,000 deaths that are attributable to these nuclear tests." Congress received the preliminary report last August.

More than 2,000 nuclear tests have been conducted worldwide since the first nuclear bomb was built in the Manhattan Project in World War II, but the CDC/NCI study considered only those above-ground tests that took place between 1951 and 1962. The United States and the Soviet Union agreed in 1963 to restrict nuclear tests to underground sites.

"What is surprising and very new is that it has created intense hot spots in the continental United States all the way from California and Washington to Vermont, New Hampshire and North Carolina," said Dr. Arjun Makhijani, president of the IEER.

And yet, the government has yet to formulate a public health response, according to IEER outreach director Lisa Ledwidge, a biologist. She noted that officials in the 1950s notified suppliers of photographic film of expected fallout patterns so they could protect their film, but did not share the information with milk producers, for example.

A 1997 report by the National Cancer Institute, which dealt with only one radionuclide -- iodine-131 -- indicated that "farm children ... 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 plant accident," Makhijani said.

The IEER called for the government to expand its compensation program for test site "downwinders" to include hot spots thousands of miles from the test sites themselves, and to formulate and implement a comprehensive response to the public health threat posed by the fallout. Harkin agreed.

"People have a right to know if they were exposed where the big areas of fallout were and they need to be screened and told what to do to protect their health," the senator said.

Find this article at:

<http://archives.cnn.com/2002/US/03/01/nuclear.fallout>

Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

