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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Subcommittee on Health and the Environment

of the

Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce

Washington, D.C. 20515

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OFFICE OF THE
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

April 21, 1978

Dr. Harold Brown
 Secretary of Defense
 The Pentagon

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to express our concern and to request an explanation from you regarding the Department of Defense's participation in the clean-up of radioactive particles and debris remaining on Enewetak Atoll.

It is our understanding that work is underway and that it is being performed under the direction of the Defense Nuclear Agency with personnel from all service branches assigned to the actual on-site cleanup work.

Our Subcommittee's work in the area of health effects of ionizing radiation, in particular the possible effects of the atomic testing program on military test participants, along with the number of scientific studies which link low-level radiation and cancer, clearly demonstrate that serious questions remain unanswered about radiation hazards. Because of this, we would like specific information regarding the Defense Department's participation in the Enewetak cleanup and about what protective measures are being taken. In particular, what are the radioactive isotopes to be removed from the islands in the atoll and how would the servicemen's duties expose them to these materials? What are the radiation-exposure standards being applied in the Enewetak work and what procedures are being followed to insure that those standards are strictly enforced? What actual exposures are expected for the military workers? How are the men being protected against inhalation and ingestion or absorption of the radioactive material?

The Enewetak cleanup, of course, has been authorized and funded by Congress. Since the work must continue, we would urge, however, that, based on the potential risk as demonstrated by the experience with the testing program, you might want to consider using volunteers only in the cleanup work. Furthermore, we strongly believe that the participants should be fully apprised of the known and potential risks of the exposures

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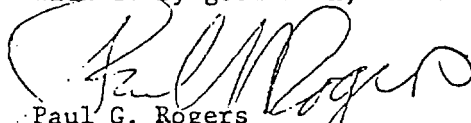
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Secretary Brown
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they will be getting and, in particular, that they be told that the risks may be greater than is now believed. We would suggest also that permanent records be maintained by the Defense Department of every participant and that detailed medical records be kept along with detailed records of their duties, exposures and activities on the atoll. A possible followup of the participants might be planned for as well.

If these steps are being taken, we would be pleased to know of that; if they are not, we would urge that they be instituted. While the final answers concerning health effects of low-level radiation exposures are still unknown, we should not be guilty of failing to provide all possible protection for servicemen now cleaning up the debris from this country's nuclear testing in the Enewetak Atoll.

As we understand that the initial sitework has been completed and that contingents of military personnel began the actual cleanup in November, with new contingents scheduled to arrive there next month, we expect a prompt reply.

With every good wish, we are


Paul G. Rogers
Chairman
Subcommittee on Health
and the Environment


Tim Lee Carter
Ranking Minority Member

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