

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

U. S. ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 13, 1951STATEMENT BY BRIGADIER GENERAL JAMES COONEY, RADIATION SAFETY ADVISER TO
JOINT TASK FORCE THREE

Our experience in recent test programs repeatedly has demonstrated that radiation hazards will not delay rescue and recovery work after an air burst of an atom bomb. There is no reason that every casualty cannot be removed and treated immediately without serious radiation hazard to rescuers.

In the case of a high aerial burst of an atomic weapon, such as I think probably would be used, there would be no residual radiation. In a low air burst just above the ground's surface, the significant residual radiation would be confined to an area 300 to 400 yards in radius. No rescue work would be required in this area because it would be devastated. Rescuers would not be subject to injurious ionizing radiation in reaching survivors.

At Eniwetok for instance, large numbers of scientists and technicians returned to the test islands, as quickly as transportation by air and water permitted, to recover their instruments and data needed for their research. On one of the islands where new construction was required full time work started 1,000 yards from the detonation point on the day of the explosion and within the 72 hours required to build barracks, the workers occupied their quarters. There was residual radioactivity in an area immediately around the detonation point because the detonations were made from towers.

Radiation safety surveys made after the tests in the immediate area of Eniwetok Atoll and neighboring inhabited atolls failed to reveal any contamination of a serious nature. Food and drinking water outside the destroyed area continued to be fit for consumption.

The immediate radiation hazard from the air burst disappears after the first two minutes. Rescue, fire fighting and recovery work can begin immediately in any area where there is life, as in any major catastrophe caused by conventional air attacks, earthquakes or disasters on the scale of those at Texas City and Halifax.

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