

United States conducted 212 atmospheric tests from 1945 to 1965.

Since then, the U.S. government has admitted to the release of considerable amounts of radioactive debris.

The initial tests sometimes left many people injured. One test conducted in the Martial Islands, located in the Pacific Ocean where many of the first tests were conducted, left 290 people injured after a change in wind direction, Allen says.

Much of the total impact of early testing still is unclear, Allen says, but radioactive debris deposited on the Earth's surface from those tests still are detectable today.

Allen says radioactive material from a nuclear weapons test has a 28-year half-life. Material from a nuclear power plant has a 30-year half-life, he says.

Allen says some people believe weapons tests done today could help scientists learn how to deal with radiation from other sources.

Every year, he says, people are exposed to more and more doses of radiation because of the gradual depletion of the ozone layer.

"At some point man's going to have to deal with radiation big time," he says, and the results from the weapons testing could help.

Wayne Bliss, director of the Office of Radiation Programs at the site's Las Vegas facility, says many other useful types of research also are done at the test site.

"There is a lot of research on how to store nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain, laser research . . . and many things

done under the veil of secrecy," he says. Other research on medicine, computers and drilling technology also takes place at the site, he says.

"These are all extremely useful things," he says.

Bliss says he thinks people not connected with the site may be opposed to the nuclear testing, even "though the risk of being hurt from radiation is infinitely small."

"I am a technician . . . the public may not perceive risks the same as a technician," he says.

The public often responds to the testing emotionally, and may not understand that from a technical point of view, the facts show testing is safe.

Allen says that by dealing with issues like testing emotionally, people fail to look at an alternative point of view.

"You always look at the other direction, otherwise how do you know?" he says.

Besides, Allen says, today's public "demands safety."

Activists in the 1970s were conscientious about the environment and helped bring about safety changes in nuclear testing, he says.

Boyer says protesters at the Nevada Test Site, who started showing up about eight years ago, are a different breed than the protesters of earlier years.

"I think a lot of protesters are just there to give the authorities a kick," he says.

Protesters at "Reclaim the Test Site II" April 7-16 presented more of a "picnic atmosphere" than a setting for "serious concerns."

Boyer says he didn't think the protesters took their efforts as seriously as others in the past.

"Six people covered themselves with mud and got down on all fours . . . what's that got to do with protesting nuclear weapons?" he asks.

Boyer and others say that today's protests are more against nuclear weapons than they are against nuclear weapons testing.

However, he says, maintaining a strong defense makes sure "nobody picks on you."

"When you were in grade school who got kicked around? -- the weak ones. People stay away from those who would possibly turn the tables on them."

"Since we've had nuclear weapons how many countries have attacked us?" Boyer asks. "Having that strength is a deterrent to war."

Bliss says he also believes the weapons are a "true deterrent" to war, and the only way for them to be effective is through testing.

"Just as one cannot depend on their car" without a tune-up, he says, "we cannot depend upon our nuclear stockpile unless it is tested."

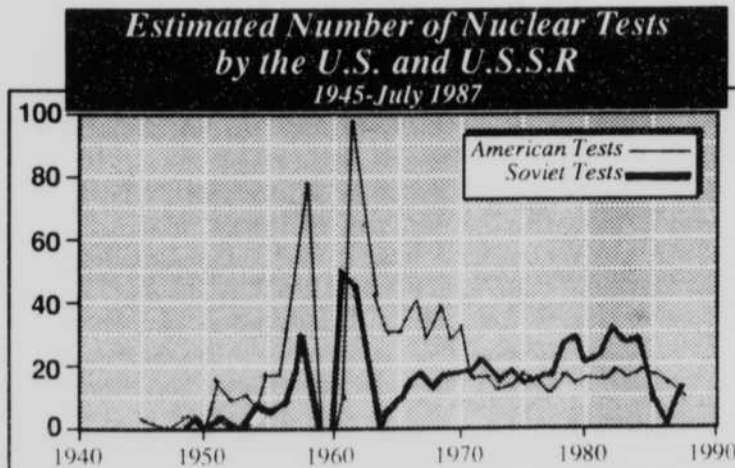
Protesters do not really have an effect on the test site or its workers, Bliss says.

"They're a nuisance to the Department of Energy and taxpayers, but it's a price we have to pay for democracy," he says.

-- Lee Rood



Connie Sheehan/Daily Nebraskan

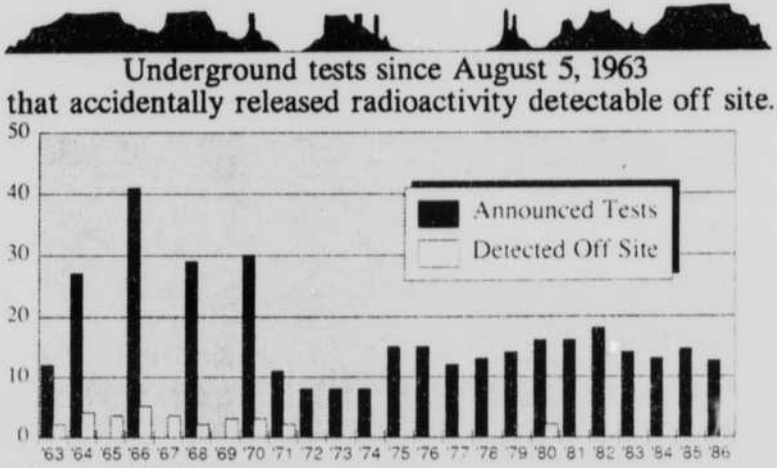


Sources: Stockholm International Research Institute, Natural Resources Defense Council, Washington, D.C.
Note: Excludes 18 Soviet tests between 1956-1958 and 12 Soviet tests between 1965-1977

Nuclear Test Explosions Since 1945

U.S.	932	*includes 20 joint U.K./U.S. tests.
U.S.S.R.	638	
France	172	
U.K.	41	
China	34	
India	1	
Total	1,798	

Source: DOE, CDI, NRDC.



John Bruce/Daily Nebraskan Source: United States Environmental Protection Agency

A poster taped to the wall of a tunnel beneath Highway 95 recounts the exposure of the Bullock Brothers and their 2,000 sheep to extensive fallout from an atomic test in 1953. At one time, the information was considered highly classified.