

Panel: Few subjects need compensation

WASHINGTON — Most people subjected to government-sanctioned radiation tests during the Cold War suffered little or no long-lasting effect and should not be compensated, an advisory panel says in its report to the president.

The panel, which documented some 4,000 radiation experiments in an 18-month study, said that it found only three cases — involving roughly 30 individuals — where compensation clearly is warranted.

However, other cases may warrant compensation when more information about them is determined, it said. The experiments, many of them highly secret, occurred over three decades beginning in the 1940s.

The findings by the 14-member Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments, were submitted

to the White House on Monday. President Clinton was expected to outline the government's response, including future actions, at a ceremony Tuesday.

Dr. Ruth Faden, the panel's chairman, said Monday that the committee sought to establish a clear "framework" that calls for compensation in any experiments where subjects were deliberately misled, did not give clear consent and where physical harm can be shown.

Only three experiments, including the deliberate injection of 18 individuals with plutonium in the 1940s, clearly met the panels' criteria, she said.

The advisory panel also rejected suggestions that the government provide widespread notification to the subjects of past experiments. And it

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Report sent to White House by the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments

recommended against formal medical followup of experiments, concluding they would be of little medical benefit in experiments that occurred decades ago.

Instead, the panel said the government should use the more than 100,000 documents gathered during its investigation as a data bank for individuals

wishing more information about possible human experimentation.

Faden, speaking to reporters at a briefing, said the panel believed resoundingly that individuals have a right to know whether they were subjected to a government-sponsored experiment. But that process, she said, should start by providing individuals effi-

cient access to documents.

Among the most troubling aspects of the Cold War-era experiments was the cloak of secrecy that surrounded them, said Faden, a bioethicist at Johns Hopkins University. Experiments often were kept under wraps for decades because of fear of bad publicity, the advisory panel found.

It concludes that most of the 4,000 experiments that the panel documented involved adult patients who were given low-dose radioactive tracers that "are unlikely to have caused physical harm" or resulted in long-term health concerns.

"The damage is not physical injury, although this, too, did occur in some cases, (but) the pain felt by people who believe that they or their loved ones were treated with disrespect," the report said.

Sheik moved to 'Noplaceville' prison

NEW YORK — A day after being convicted of conspiring to wage holy war against the United States, Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman was moved Monday from New York to a medical prison in Missouri.

One of his lawyers, Lynne Stewart, complained to U.S. District Judge Michael Mukasey that the blind sheik had been taken "to a peculiarly inaccessible part of the world." Later, she told reporters her client had been taken "to Middle America, to Noplaceville."

The sheik, who has diabetes and heart trouble, will be evaluated at the U.S. Medical Center for Federal Prisoners in Springfield, Mo. He arrived there in a sedan guarded by police with assault weapons.

After examining the sheik, doctors will decide which prison he will be sent to, prison spokesman Marty Anderson said.

Abdel-Rahman was convicted Sunday along with nine others in a seditious conspiracy plot to attack the United States through bombings, assassinations and kidnappings. He could get life in prison without parole when he is sentenced in late January.

The judge told defense lawyers he could do nothing about the sheik's move to the maximum-security prison in Springfield, which has 922 inmates.

Another one of the sheik's lawyers, Abdeen M. Jabara, said the early morning move was "a form of harassment basically" and the distance from his

lawyers will make it harder for the sheik to prepare for sentencing and begin work on his appeal.

In Fayoum, Egypt, two of the sheik's sons called their father's conviction unjust, saying he had telephoned Monday to tell them about it.

Abdallah Abdel-Rahman, 20, and 18-year-old Abdel-Rahman Omar Abdel-Rahman spoke on the doorstep of the family's home, where the sheik's two wives and 10 children live.

Abdallah said his father told them to be patient and pray.

"We are not surprised because the United States is the enemy of Islam," Abdallah said.

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Emboldened France vows to continue nuclear tests

PAPEETE, Tahiti — Emboldened by luke-warm reaction to its second nuclear test in the South Pacific, France reaffirmed its commitment Monday to press ahead with more underground blasts.

The environmental group Greenpeace called Sunday's test beneath Fangataufa Atoll in French Polynesia "an enormous affront." Australia and New Zealand lodged formal protests with the French government, and New Zealand called in its French ambassador.

But the United States and other key allies merely expressed "regret" at the test, and Britain and Germany reacted with indifference.

"I haven't heard any demands — I've only heard regrets," Foreign Minister Herve de Charette of France said at a meeting of European foreign ministers in Luxembourg.

Premier Alain Juppe said Monday that France will conduct up to six more tests and "be among the first" to sign a global test ban treaty next year.

President Jacques Chirac has promised to sign the treaty after the tests, which he contends are safe and necessary.

The Foreign Ministry repeated on Monday that France might shorten the series of tests, now planned to end by June, if it gets enough information from the first few blasts.

But environmental groups and the nations of the South Pacific have reacted angrily to the tests, which break a three-year moratorium. The world's other nuclear powers, except China, have not tested nuclear arms since 1992.

"It is a wrong call for France politically, and it is irresponsible environmentally," said New Zealand's prime minister, Jim Bolger.

Sunday's blast also provoked swift condemnation from the prime minister of Australia.

Japan, Russia, the United States, Chile, Sweden and the European Commission merely expressed "regret." Germany and Britain — Europe's other nuclear power — carefully avoided criticizing the blast.

"If the French decide there is a need for tests before a comprehensive test ban treaty, that is a matter for them," the British Foreign Office said in a statement.

The White House defended its reaction. "The use of the word 'regret' in respect to one of our close European allies is strong indeed," said presidential spokesman Mike McCurry.

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Computer can re-check Pap smears

WASHINGTON — A computer system to help doctors more reliably double check Pap smears for signs of cervical cancer in women has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

The AutoPap QC system by NeoPath Inc. of Redmond, Wash., the first computer of its kind to be approved by the FDA, is to replace the random method of rescreening Pap smears that laboratories currently use.

In the Pap smear, the standard test for detecting cervical cancer, doctors scrape cells of the cervix and examine them for abnormalities. Cervical cancer is easily treated if caught in the early stages.

But laboratories miss the abnormal cells between 5 percent and 25 percent of the time, depending on the lab, an FDA spokeswoman

said. The AutoPap, approved Friday, will automatically rescreen the pool of Pap smears that labs using it have determined are normal, and then select 10 percent of the most suspicious samples for a second, manual screening.

Lab technicians known as cytotechnologists currently view thousands of samples under microscopes daily. The labs are required by law to randomly select 10 percent of all reviewed samples for a second analysis.

But the FDA cautioned that the system is not error-proof.

"What this new product does is it increases the number of abnormal slides identified in the Pap smear reading process, but it's not fool-proof," FDA spokeswoman Sharon Snyder said. "There can still be reading errors."