

DIVISION OF RADIOLOGICAL HEALTH

PART I. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

1. Objectives

To plan, conduct, and coordinate a national program directed to the understanding and prevention of health impairments resulting from exposures to ionizing radiations, and the application of ionizing radiations and their sources to the preservation and betterment of health.

2. Operation

The rapid increase in peacetime uses of nuclear energy, including military and industrial use of power reactors, introduces problems of radiation exposure and radioactive waste disposal; the use of radioisotopes and X-rays in medical diagnosis and therapy touches all segments of the population. Radioactivity levels from nuclear weapons tests in previous years have indicated the need to improve nationwide surveillance and studies of methods to reduce and control exposure from those sources which are susceptible to control. For the most part, health agencies lack trained personnel, equipment, funds, and legislation adequate to meet these problems.

Program activities include:

State assistance.—Assist State and local health agencies in the development of radiological health program, including State program development grants; conduct demonstrations in the application of new methods and equipment for surveillance and control of health hazards from radiation.

Training.—Develop a national training program to increase the supply of professional personnel serving State, local, and Federal agencies, industry, and universities through conduct of short courses and provision of training grants to support university curriculums.

Research.—Study the biological effects of radiation through human epidemiological studies with appropriate radiological support; collate, analyze, and interpret radiation exposure data and develop control techniques; provide research grants to private investigators.

Technical operations.—Conduct nationwide environmental monitoring programs. Administer laboratories at Las Vegas, Nev., Montgomery, Ala., Rockville, Md., and Winchester, Mass. Provide technical laboratory services and training. Administer safety programs in conjunction with the Atomic Energy Commission, Department of Defense, and other Federal agencies.

3. History

In July 1958, the Surgeon General established the Division of Radiological Health in the Public Health Service. The new division was assigned the mission of developing a comprehensive program of radiological health in the Public Health Service in collaboration with other related programs of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

In the development of a comprehensive program, three major tasks have been undertaken:

A nationwide system of radiation surveillance;

An evaluation of the long-term health effects of radiation;

Development of methods and programs by which radiation exposure can be reduced or prevented.