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HEALTH CONTROL AT ENIWETOK

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REFERENCE: LAB-N

I spoke this morning by telephone with Col. Cooney in Washington relative to the problems which we are facing at Eniwetok. It is now perfectly obvious to all of us that exposure to any dust in that area is potentially dangerous. It is Col. Cooney's opinion with which I concur, that any dust producing operations at Eniwetok be forbidden until the actual operations of covering the crater areas begin. The actual filling-in operations will require careful monitoring and health physics through the entire process, but even during this period it is problematical whether health officials will be able to do much more than lay down certain general regulations.

At the present time a monitor can tell with a reasonable degree of accuracy what areas are hot and what areas are cold. It is absolutely impossible for a monitor, an industrial hygienist, or a physician, in the light of our present knowledge, to tell anyone how dangerous a cloud of wind blown dust actually is. This is a research problem in itself requiring a considerable amount of equipment to make determinations of particle sizes and percentages of radioactive material. At the present time we can only make the supposition that inhalation of the dust is probably dangerous and that it should be avoided at all costs. Dusty clothes and respirators can be monitored, but that is simply locking the stable after the horse is gone. For the present I feel that we can only make the generality that dust producing operations must be avoided and if any such becomes absolutely essential all personnel in any way exposed must wear approved respirators.

When we come to actual earth moving operations there must be available one individual who shall be responsible for health matters. This man could be either a physician with adequate training in health physics or a thoroughly capable and fully qualified health physicist. In either event the man should have full opportunity to familiarize himself with the problems which will probably be encountered. The experience and training we can provide here. Col. Cooney stated that if we are entirely unable to produce the proper individual that he will be prepared if need be to assign one of the Army Medical Corps officers presently stationed in Los Alamos to the job. Personally I hope that this solution will not be necessary, but it at least gives me the reassurance that someone will be ready when the time comes.

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