

Cancer deaths blamed on nuke test blasts

CEDAR CITY, Utah (AP) — Within a 200-yard radius of Blaine and Loa Johnson's home, 11 people have died of cancer, five of them from leukemia. Two more neighbors have leukemia now.

The 10-year toll from the disease aroused the couple's suspicions about their daughter's leukemia death in 1965.

They are not alone.

The Johnsons and up to 250 other relatives of cancer victims in Southern Utah and Northern Arizona communities have or will soon file formal claims against the federal government. They allege the deaths were caused by radioactive fallout from Nevada nuclear testing during the 1950s and early 1960s.

The claims seek over \$1 million for each death.

Residents used to get up early to catch a glimpse of the brilliant pre-dawn flashes 100 miles away as they appeared above the red sandstone bluffs. Enormous mushroom clouds followed, wafted overhead by prevailing winds.

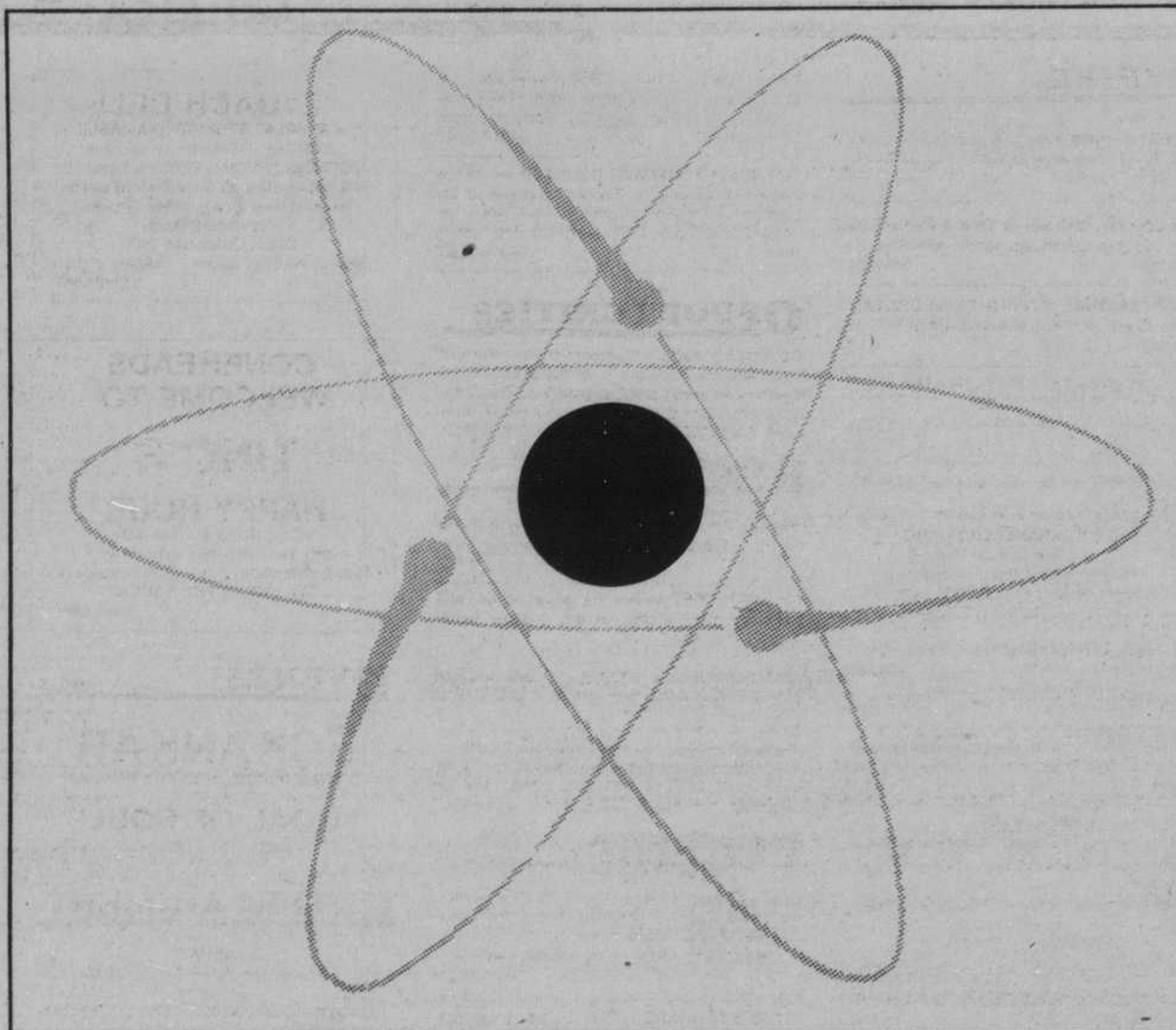
"Everyone thought it was the neatest thing to watch the blast just before dawn, watch the cloud form and then drift by," said St. George resident John Rogers, whose mother died of cancer in 1956.

But idle curiosity has turned to claims by residents of a cancer epidemic.

Their fears the toll will mount are fueled by a lack of scientific data on the number and causes of the deaths.

"We actually believed that the federal government would not involve itself in anything that would jeopardize the public health," said Ronald Garner of St. George, whose 7-year-old daughter died in 1966 of neuroblastoma, a rare form of cancer.

The Department of Energy,



which has six months to respond to the claims before lawsuits are filed, says no evidence exists linking the deaths to fallout. But state and federal officials want the matter studied.

Janet Jones of Parowan says her 7-year-old daughter, who died in 1959, was one of four youngsters in Parowan and nearby Paragonah to die of leukemia in a two-year period.

A U.S. Public Health Service study in 1967 showed unexplained clusters of leukemia deaths in Parowan, Paragonah and Mon-

ticello, but the study was never made public and was apparently shelved.

Attorney MacArthur Wright, who is handling the claims with fellow attorneys Dale Haralson, Tucson, Ariz., and former Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, says he believes the number of area cancer deaths is more than twice the national average.

Cancer has struck some families hard.

Leora Hafen of St. George was widowed 13 years ago when her husband, a rancher who was out-

doors during many of the blasts, died of cancer. Their 15-year-old daughter died of acute leukemia in 1956, Mrs. Hafen's mother of cancer in 1966, and her brother-in-law, rancher Paul Hafen, of leukemia in 1963.

"We could stand here at our front window and watch the clouds come over the hill," she says,

"never knowing what it was going to do to us."

A friend of Hafen's, Northern Arizona rancher Max Brinkerhoff, died of leukemia Feb. 27. Three of Brinkerhoff's friends from childhood—Gayne Macklepp-rang, Lavier Tait and Gail Heaton—also died of leukemia.

Utah Gov. Scott Matheson, a resident of Southern Utah during the above-ground testing, said "a lot of people I grew up with are no longer with us. They died of cancer." He has called for an independent study "by anybody but the federal government" of a possible link between the deaths and radiation.

Matheson is to discuss the matter at the White House Tuesday with Jack Watson, presidential domestic affairs advisor.

Peter Libassi, Health, Education and Welfare general counsel, said a radiation task force he heads faces a "much longer, more complicated and difficult problem than we thought when we started."

Libassi said his report could go to HEW Secretary Joseph A. Califano Jr. and the White House after Jan. 1.

The task force is considering how to identify the injured, how to compensate them, and what the government should do to reduce the effects of low-level radiation.

Wright said concern about cancer deaths in the area was piqued by the plight of former U.S. soldiers like Paul Cooper, Emmett, Idaho, who claimed before his death from leukemia earlier this year that exposure to a nuclear blast in 1957 caused his disease.

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