

ARE WE ENDANGERING OUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN?

(Continued)

fission, there are radioactive wastes. Some of these wastes are being released into the atmosphere. Some are being introduced into our rivers. Some are being buried in the earth or dumped in the ocean.

In underground steel tanks, enough radioactive waste is stored to pollute all the land and water of the U.S. These tanks are expected to last from 10 to 15 years. Then the material will have to be transferred, or some new method found for disposal.

For several years, uranium mills have been pouring "low-level" radioactive wastes into rivers without Government regulation. The sea also is being used as a disposal plant for radioactive wastes. The waste is either sluiced into rivers that empty into the ocean or dumped overboard from barges in steel concrete containers.

THE DAY is close at hand when we can change the oceans' salt water into fresh water and thus transform desert regions into rich foodlands—but there is a risk that we may have polluted the oceans with radioactive material before that day arrives. Thus whole populations of the present and future stand to be exposed involuntarily and unwittingly to radioactive materials whose hazard to the human race can only be guessed. *The long-term safe disposal of radioactive substances is an international public-health problem which will be with us for centuries to come.*

Until now the responsibility for determining what dangers radiation raises and how to control them has been dissipated among too many scientific committees supported by various Government departments.

A new administration in Washington and a new President are moving to grapple with the tremendous problems that face us at home and abroad. President Kennedy has appointed John Jay McCloy as director of the U.S. Disarmament Administration which will deal with the question of further nuclear testing. However, many scientists feel that the time is ripe for the establishment of a top-level agency to deal solely with radiation and national health.

What seems to be urgently needed is a powerful new arm of the Government to protect our people today and the children of tomorrow from indiscriminate and excessive doses of man-made radiation from any source. It must be concerned not with the development of nuclear energy but with the need to *safeguard everybody's health.*

In the meantime, what can you as an individual do to protect yourself and your

family against radiation? First of all, in regard to X-ray or fluoroscopic treatment, don't panic. There is no need to panic if we take constructive steps now. By constructive steps, I suggest that we all begin a permanent radiation diary which describes the medical and dental radiation diagnostic tests and treatments which each member of your family undergoes. It should list dates of exposure, as well as the estimated dosage when possible. Be sure that each physician or dentist who proposes a radiation test or treatment is acquainted with the diary's contents.

I also suggest that we support organizations and legislation attempting to set up public safeguards against the misuse and overuse of radiation.

Legislation should be enacted providing that every baby in the U.S. be provided with a medical record which would itemize and total his known exposures to doses of man-made radiation from birth.

Far more stringent controls should be exercised over radiation use.

State legislatures should set up more stringent codes and regulations for licensing and supervising doctors, dentists, and technicians operating X-ray equipment.

Medical and dental societies should exercise far more vigorous campaigns among doctors, dentists, and hospitals to reduce unnecessary exposure to radiation, and these should be augmented by far more stringent controls, at the state and Federal level, over radiological machines and the people operating them.

MOST IMPORTANT of all, the public must be alerted to the dangers of radiation from all man-made sources. Throughout the country, groups should be organized like the St. Louis Committee for Nuclear Information which has been publishing reports on radiation hazards and collecting the baby teeth of children to measure accurately the accumulations of strontium-90. Cities and towns also would do well to follow the example of New York where a Scientists' Committee for Radiation Information is providing community groups with speakers on radiation and nuclear energy.

As we move inevitably into the nuclear age, we all must realize that there still are enormous gaps in our knowledge of radiation's possible harmful effects. If we fail to meet this deadly challenge in the coming decades, the results can be disastrous. The 1950s told us much that was new and alarming about radiation. But warnings by scientists and medical men have not taken effect; we still lag in mobilizing our resources to meet this invisible enemy.

Let us pray that, as we move further into the 1960s, we don't make the same mistakes. The stakes are the world of the future and its children.

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