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Copy sent to Island

MDG. 3050/58/SSE.

7th August, 1958.

Sir,

Radiological Safety Precautions for Service Personnel participating in Nuclear Weapon Trials at Christmas Island. (Air Ministry Letter G.10/D. of H.A.R. dated 24.7.58. refers)

The Medical Director-General of the Navy has taken note that it is the intention that in forthcoming weapon trials at Christmas Island all personnel who are at all likely to be exposed to ionising radiation hazards by entering the controlled areas will have preliminary blood count examinations carried out by A.W.R.E. technicians before they are detailed for this duty and concurs strongly in the need for instituting this wise precaution.

2. With reference to the other very much more numerous personnel on the Island or in snipe in the area who are unlikely to be exposed to the fall-out hazard it is considered, that in view of the considerable numbers involved, the technical difficulties of completing adequate blood examinations in time and the programme of tests under consideration, it would do more harm than good to institute an elaborate testing programme at short notice. Such a crash programme might well serve to alarm those who consider that there is no smoke without fire, it would inevitably have to be extended to all in the area eventually, and it would serve little useful medical purpose.

3. It is understood, from the facts available to the Admiralty, that the chance of personnel in the group outside the controlled areas being exposed to a radiation dose which will damage the haemopoietic systems of certain individuals represents only a remote military hazard, which preliminary blood examinations would in practice do little, or nothing to minimise. But, presumably the plans of trials might in the future be changed in certain respects so that the hazard to personnel outside the controlled area might be increased. This Department's view is that this hazard can only be assessed competently by Grapple Headquarters and the medical advisers to the Headquarters and whatever policy is suggested by this Headquarters concerning precautionary measures will almost certainly be adopted by the Admiralty.

4. Action has already been taken to arrange for blood examinations for naval replacement personnel leaving for Christmas Island in the near future by the Captain, Grapple Squadron, in accordance with the practice already adopted for naval personnel appointed to the Maralinga Range (C.A.F.O. 81/58 refers). The numbers involved are manageable, and the drafting situation was such that if action had not been initiated promptly a considerable number of personnel would have been missed if, at a later date, blood examinations for replacements were considered to be desirable by Grapple Headquarters. This instruction will be cancelled if the Air Ministry, the [redacted] and A.W.R.E. agree that routine blood examinations for replacements are unnecessary.

5. It is agreed that the preliminary examination of the occupants of the controlled area should conform to the Special (Ionising Radiation) Regulations (Factories Act), as laid down in the Draft, but that if a man's Pulmocms x-ray is in date and negative the chest x-ray should be omitted.

I am, Sir,
Your obedient Servant,

[redacted] H0022

JN MEDICAL DIRECTOR-GENERAL.

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Director of Hygiene and Research,
Air Ministry,
[redacted]

[redacted]

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