

Adjournment Debate

ened, but because the Canadian Human Rights Commission found it was unacceptable to have different limitations for women and for men. The Canadian Human Rights Commission made that finding because the different limitations were preventing women from access to many jobs. But instead of lowering the allowable exposure rate, the AECB increased the rate. Some officials of AECB are on record as saying that this will increase the risk to those women and to their unborn children. The only new provision which the AECB has provided to protect the unborn is this: Is it suggested women who are pregnant must notify their employers in order that corrective measures can be taken.

Let me tell you what this really means, Mr. Speaker. Most women in this country do not know they are pregnant in the first month or two of the pregnancy. That is the very time when the danger is the greatest to the unborn fetus, especially the increased radiation being proposed by the AECB. That is not an acceptable alternative. Not only is it unacceptable, it is dangerous to the health of both the woman and the unborn child.

● (1805)

There are other concerns with regard to the proposed regulations. Young workers under 18 will now be allowed to be exposed to full adult doses. Prior to this, adults under the age of 18 had lower limits, and for good reason. If you are exposed to it year after year, the annual limit will be more harmful to your health. The risk is much greater. By allowing younger workers to be exposed to a full rate earlier in life the risk is increased. In addition, the Atomic Energy Control Board is removing the two weekly and quarterly dose limits which used to exist for workers. Those limits are being abandoned by AECB.

I only have a few minutes left to speak on this issue. I want to talk about my major concern. Not only are the meetings behind closed doors, not only are they increasing the danger to young people, women and unborn children, but AECB is much too close to AECL. It is not an effective independent tribunal. If we are going to have an agency which has control over the atomic energy industry of this nation, if it is to be a board which has public faith on environmental issues, public safety and worker safety, it has to be a tribunal completely independent of AECL and the industry.

Mr. Dave Dingwall (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the comments at the end of the Hon. Member's remarks, I hope that he will want to appear before the AECB when it has its hearings and present his case at that time. He may see some feedback on some of his suggestions.

In so far as the proposed new radiation protection regulations are concerned, workers and members of the public will be protected by a more comprehensive system. In this new system, the total risk of exposure to different parts of the body will be limited to that corresponding to 5 rem. In the current regulations, each individual part of the body can be exposed to separate independent limits with the potential for a higher

total risk. In addition, it is proposed that employers be required to keep the total exposure to all workers and members of the public as low as reasonably achievable.

With regard to women employed in the atomic energy industry, the approach taken in previous regulations has been to apply additional restrictions to all women of reproductive capacity. An undesirable consequence of these additional restrictions is that women have been denied employment in some jobs on the grounds that the regulatory limits for women might be exceeded.

The AECB has been asked by the Canadian Human Rights Commission and others if the additional restrictions for women are really necessary. The AECB's medical advisors concluded that they were necessary only when a woman is known to be pregnant. Therefore, in the proposed regulations additional restrictions apply only to women known to be pregnant and the onus is placed on each woman to decide for herself whether or not to accept the risk associated with employment as an atomic radiation worker. In order to assist in such decisions, the employer is required to inform her of the risks to embryos, and foetuses of exposure to radiation.

Once a woman is known to be pregnant, essentially the same limits in both the current and proposed regulations apply. In the current regulations, this limit is 1 rem during the known period of pregnancy. In the proposed regulations, this is expressed as .06 rem per two weeks, which would accumulate to 1 rem in 33 weeks. It may be surmised that the proposed regulations recognize a greater degree of liberty in individual decision making while requiring that appropriate information be made available to the persons involved.

In view of the importance of the proposed regulations for workers, members of the public, employers and labour unions, the Atomic Energy Control Board, as part of its public consultation process, will be holding a series of meetings in early 1984 with representatives of the various interested parties who may have requested this, and make application to appear before them. I am confident that if there is any justifiable request for an appearance or representation, the Atomic Energy Control Board will accede to that request.

● (1810)

AGRICULTURE—EXCHANGE OF PLANT GENETIC RESOURCES

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, last November at the biannual conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization, a paper prepared by FAO at the instruction of the 1981 conference was presented on the subject of plant genetic resources. This paper describes the growing concern, especially in Third World countries, about the erosion of genetic materials. This has been exacerbated by the green revolution, which has as its goal the increase of production using modern techniques including hybrid and improved seed. Unfortunately, some of this missionary work has been misguided, inappropriate and downright harmful when traditional production methods which did work were replaced by modern techniques that do not work. Mother nature can be