



## STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS  
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 55/13 THE EFFECTS OF RADIATION ON HUMAN HEALTH

A reply tabled by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, Mr. Paul Martin, in answer to an inquiry by Mr. F.A. Enfield, M.P., in the House of Commons, Ottawa, April 4, 1955.

(1) Is any research being carried out by the Department of National Health and Welfare regarding the harmful effect of atomic radiation on humans?

Yes.

Radioactivity, of course, is not a new phenomenon. Since life first appeared on this planet, living beings have been exposed to cosmic and natural radiation. Thus, it is not an essentially new influence which is being considered, but an increase in the intensity of an influence which has never been entirely absent.

It was not until the discovery of radium and X-rays over half a century ago that the possibility emerged that some human beings would be exposed to greater amounts of radiation than naturally occur in the everyday environment. Since that time, scientists have shown a continuing concern for the possible harmful effects of uncontrolled radiation. A system of protection has slowly developed as is manifest by the precautions observed in the use of X-ray and radioactive materials and in the regulations governing the use of isotopes in this country since the war.

Problems associated with radiation have engaged the attention of officers of the Department of National Health and Welfare and of a number of other government agencies for more than ten years.

Experience gained during this period enabled Canada to pioneer in developing a promising advance in the treatment of cancer -- the Cobalt 60 Beam Therapy Unit -- which has since brought new hope to thousands of cancer victims and has received world-wide recognition. Many industrial uses of radio-isotopes have also been developed in Canada, ranging all the way from testing the welds on enormous metal castings to controlling the thickness of paper as it comes through the paper-making machines. These isotopes have also been made available to other countries.