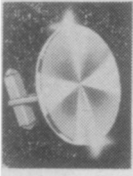


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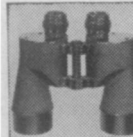
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PUBLIC HEALTH

Picked for Radiation Study

ST. LOUIS has become the second target area singled out for a thorough investigation to establish exactly how much damage is being done by the radiation occurring daily throughout the country.

First area to be singled out for such a study was San Juan County in New Mexico, where radioactivity from radium in the surface water of the Animas River has been higher than that found in most areas in the United States. Surgeon General Leroy E. Burney of the U.S. Public Health Service said that extensive data already obtained on the amount of radioactivity in that southwestern area will be used to study the amounts of radioactivity people are taking in, the amounts retained, the total "body burden," and the effects upon their health.

Health officials expect to be able to determine whether an actual or potential health problem exists, and if so, to what extent.

In addition, surveys of dairy farms will soon begin in the various milk sheds serving St. Louis. Water supplies, sources of animal food, climate, farming and animal feeding practices and other variables will be studied. The milk shed study will wind up with a series of field experiments to determine whether, if necessary, the radioactive content of milk can be reduced by modifications in dairy farming practices.

The levels of strontium-90 have been somewhat higher in the St. Louis milk shed than in other areas. The last reading, for October, 1959, reported 25.1 micro microcuries per liter, which is now close

to the new maximum permissible level of 33. Recently, the level of strontium-90 intake permitted for humans was lowered from 80 to 33 micro microcuries. Each of these figures applies to intake over a lifetime. A curie is a basic unit of radioactivity equal to the radiation from a gram of radium.

The new figure was exceeded only once, in April, 1959, when it rose to 37.3 in St. Louis. The new lowered permissible limit of 33 micro microcuries will be used only until a definitive report is issued by the Federal Radiation Council, established by the President.

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MEDICINE

Cases of Hepatitis Hit Peak in March

THE LIVER DAMAGING disease known as hepatitis is on the rise in this country, U. S. Public Health Service data reveal.

The latest figure of 851 cases, for the week ending March 19, includes both serum and infectious forms of this disease. The highest recorded number of cases for a 12-month period was 50,000 in 1954. There was a slow decline each year thereafter until 1958 when the number of cases began to rise again.

The peak of this "cycle" of the disease will probably occur in 1961, Dr. C. C. Dauer, medical adviser to the National Office of Vital Statistics, explained. To date there have been 8,160 reported cases this year compared to 6,195 for the same length of time last year. The disease usually reaches its peak in March, after which it is expected to dip for the summer months.

Since records of the incidence of the disease have been kept only since 1950, the exact cycle of hepatitis has not been determined.

Both forms of the disease are caused by viruses in the bloodstream. Symptoms include fever, skin rash, fatigue, headache, nausea, chills, diarrhea and itching. The liver can also be severely damaged.

Science News Letter, April 9, 1960