

## DOE questioned on health-effects research

There may be policy changes in store for the Department of Energy's biomedical research program. Last week the House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment leveled serious criticism at the agency and its predecessors (the Energy Research and Development Administration and the Atomic Energy Commission) for alleged unethical conduct in handling a university research contract. The case in question is a 13-year health and mortality study, conducted by Thomas F. Mancuso and colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh. They looked into the relationship between cancer incidence and radiation exposure among workers at government laboratories in Oak Ridge, Tenn., and Richland, Wash.

For a variety of reasons stated, all of which are now under question, ERDA transferred the project from Mancuso last August to Oak Ridge Associated Universities, which in turn doled out the Richland part of its program to the Battelle Pacific Northwest Laboratory. The subcommittee convened to find out why this transfer occurred and whether science had become subservient to politics.

Mancuso claims ERDA, now DOE, has alternately offered three issues to explain his removal from the project: his "imminent retirement," failure to publish and comments from a peer-review panel.

Mancuso read to the subcommittee an excerpt from a letter to a consultant on his project dated Sept. 8, 1977, from James L. Liverman, DOE's acting assistant secretary for the environment. It said Liverman had been asked by his staff in 1974 what would be done with Mancuso's data "following Dr. Mancuso's imminent retirement.

"I asked for and received a memorandum dated Dec. 2, 1974. After study and deliberation the staff recommended that the studies be continued and enlarged under the auspices of the Oak Ridge Associated Universities ... I approved ... with the proviso that Dr. Mancuso be informed [that] the study would be moved because of his imminent retirement."

But in 1974 Mancuso was 62 years old. The university would allow him to continue working until age 70 as long as research funds were available. Liverman now says, "It is clear ... that my use of the words 'imminent retirement' was unfortunate, inappropriate and perhaps even in error." Mancuso notes, however, that last November DOE was still circulating the "imminent retirement" excuse [to a Chicago Sun-Times reporter] as the reason Mancuso's project was assigned to ORAU.

In a letter to the Office of the President last August, Liverman again cited the December 2 memo to explain the termination of Mancuso's contract. This time it omitted reference to "imminent retirement" and substituted the charge of "deficiencies in

performance."

One of the stated deficiencies was failure to publish. "[Mancuso] has not as yet published any papers in edited journals, at least he could have published the methodology, the plan of the study and some preliminary results," reads an ERDA memo dated Jan. 8, 1976.

"That statement, in my opinion, is misleading," Mancuso says, "since the equivalent of a monograph of 180 or more pages was published in the proceedings of the Health Physics Society ... in 1971, which includes precisely the methodology, plan of study and some preliminary results."

"Repeatedly through the years I had been urged by ERDA to publish in scientific journals the negative findings of the progress reports," Mancuso says. "I refused to do so. I did not accept the excuse tendered that such publication would assist in the renewal of research contracts. I believed that the findings would be misleading ... and could be misused [particularly since data came in so slowly]."

He did not receive internal-radiation-exposure data on the Hanford workers in Richland through 1974 until March 1976, nor environmental exposure records for other than radiation (such as job craft, occupation and hazard categories) until March 1977. And the Oak Ridge files are still "a mess" with data entered into the computer unchecked for errors.

Another of his concerns over publishing prematurely is a fear of indicating false negatives when the latency period for cancer can be 20 or 30 years. In fact, Walter H. Weyzen, manager of DOE's human-health-studies program, used that very reason in a March 29, 1977, letter to explain that "it would have been extremely difficult [for Mancuso] to conduct meaningful analysis at an earlier time."

Sidney Marks, ERDA's project officer for the Mancuso study, told the subcommittee that his recommendation to remove Mancuso was based on very critical peer reviews, especially the most recent one in 1972. He read a summary of the reviewers' opinions — all negative.

Unknown to Marks, subcommittee chairman Paul G. Rogers (D-Fla.) had before him a summary of the reviewers' remarks written by one of the participants. It said the "consensus" of the group was that Mancuso's study was a good one and "that the University of Pittsburgh should continue as the prime contractor" — statements Marks had chosen not to read. In questioning that followed, Marks admitted that the peer reviews that he had previously described as extremely critical had in fact been "quite strongly favorable" toward Mancuso.

Liverman said he was unaware of the "positive" nature of the peer reviews — the ones he cites as the reasons for terminat-

ing Mancuso.

"I hope [DOE's] Inspector General [who is also investigating the Mancuso controversy] is listening because we need some policy changes," Rogers said. "I'm not sure that I don't question the whole issue of the Energy Department conducting health work." He charged the agency with "a cover-up" and referred to a February 1973 memo from Marks which said, "Overtures to possible [replacements for Mancuso] must be carried out now in a clandestine atmosphere."

"This is the most disordered, unstructured mess that I've looked into in some time," Rogers said.

Since none of the reasons DOE cited for Mancuso's termination satisfied the subcommittee, it looked for an explanation possibly unrelated to Mancuso — and hints of one appeared. Correspondence on the Mancuso files turned over to the subcommittee by DOE on the first day of the hearing indicate that in 1974 ERDA was looking for ways to enlarge ORAU's human-studies program. Even before ERDA had decided to terminate Mancuso, it had suggested shoring up ORAU with the addition of Mancuso's study. Liverman wrote that "while the question of scientific excellence of the Mancuso program did not get discussed in detail at that time, its ultimate movement to ORAU was certainly in the background of our thoughts as we considered what to do with ORAU."

Rogers asked why there had not been competitive bidding by Battelle or ORAU, nor peer review of their capability in continuing Mancuso's project. Weyzen said review of ORAU was unnecessary since he felt fully competent to judge. Rogers disagreed, saying that in this case work seemed to go to DOE's "friends" whether or not they were the best qualified. In fact, testimony suggested that both Battelle and ORAU were inexperienced in the epidemiology needed to complete Mancuso's project prior to ERDA's decision to terminate him. The subcommittee also charged the agency with trying to discredit Mancuso once his findings did show an increase of cancer among workers.

Finally, the subcommittee asked if there wasn't a serious conflict of interest created by having those who stand to benefit most by a negative finding carrying out the study. ORAU is in Oak Ridge near the laboratories it will study and it has a close association with them. Battelle and Hanford share the same site. Most of the research money for both ORAU and Battelle Northwest comes from DOE.

Rogers gave Liverman 10 days to plan what he would do with those staff members who had "misinformed" him as to the true nature of Mancuso's peer reviews, what corrective action should be taken, whether the program should be reassigned to Mancuso and whether "it's wise" for DOE to do in-house studies" on issues as sensitive as the health and safety of its contractors. □