

LIFE-TIME FOLLOW-UP

LEARNING FROM PLUTONIUM AND URANIUM WORKERS



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USTUR

Newsletter

Direct from the Director

Dear Registrants and Families:

I am extremely disappointed (and personally shamed) to have to report that the cumulative cuts (more than 40% over the past 4 years) in Washington State University's research grant from the U.S. Department of Energy reached the point where we were forced to release the last of our (vital) technical staff. Also, we are now reduced in research faculty to three (including myself).

And we have no funding to accept (and process) further Registrant donations this year. This untenable situation appears to be beyond the discretion of our DOE funding office, the Office of Injury and Illness Prevention Programs, to rectify—despite their sterling efforts and declared wish to do so. There seems to be little prospect of improved federal funding next year— but we will not give up. We MUST continue to follow up our volunteer Registrants!

In March, we received the Registries' thirty-seventh whole body donation—my eleventh since becoming director (in July, 2005). Together with 290 partial-body donations (since 1968), these ultimate personal (and family) donations are a tremendous and absolutely unique gift to scientific research. I'm sure that the extract below (from the obituary published by the family of our 37th whole-body donor) captures the spirit of selfless service and generosity in which all Registries donations have been made:

"One Father's day [dad] announced he had [volunteered to donate] his body to the United States Transuranium and Uranium Registries, confident that this examination of his numerous exposures to radiation over the years 'might help some young boys getting into the nuclear industry be far safer than I ever was.' It was the kind of sacrifice you would expect him to make. Typical of the men and women of his era. He had a keen sense of giving for the good of all, and this was his contribution."

From this "Donor Family Perspective" (see also back page), I am lost for adequate words!

With sincere humility and apology,

Dr. Tony James

Mortality Study of the USTUR

Dr. Herman Gibb, USTUR Scientific Advisory Committee member and President of Tetra Tech Sciences, and his colleague, Ms. Cary Haver, MPH, are conducting a Proportionate Mortality Ratio (PMR) and Proportionate Cancer Mortality Ratio (PCMR) study of those in the USTUR. Among our 304 donors, 113 died from cancer, including eight meso-

thelioma deaths. Among U.S. males, the percentage of deaths due to mesothelioma is between 0.1 and 0.2 percent. Dr. Gibb and Ms. Haver are estimating PMRs for all causes of death and PCMRs for selected cancers, including mesothelioma. They will analyze the statistical significance and possible causative factors of this

apparently elevated proportion of deaths due to mesothelioma. The USTUR is compiling and providing donor data such as the cause of death, year of birth and death, smoking history, lung radiation dose, race, gender, and industrial hygiene records (when available). Possible asbestos exposure will also

be determined for each donor, since asbestos has been causally associated with mesothelioma in some occupations.

New Laboratory Facility

After more than 2 years of searching for suitable (affordable) laboratory facilities, USTUR secured a 3-year (renewable) lease of a newly-constructed building. The lease includes

re-imbursement of the developer's costs in 'customizing' the building to meet USTUR's laboratory and tissue repository requirements. In June, we de-commissioned our old

repository building, and relocated to the new facility ("off campus" at 2340 Lindberg Loop, Richland Airport). This 6,000 sq. ft. facility includes laboratories for both radiochemistry analysis and autopsy/tissue preparation/storage. **However**, our FY2010 funding cut has forced us to release all technical staff—leaving Dr. Tolmachev with no technical support—and no funds to operate our brand new (WSU-furnished) laboratory!

FY2009 Personnel: From the left - Florencio Martinez, Chris Nielsen (student), Sergei Tolmachev, Gabriela Alpizar.



Landauer Award
Presented to
Dr. Anthony C. James

The USTUR Director was honored to receive the Robert S. Landauer, Sr. Memorial Lecture Award from the Health Physics Society President, Dr. Dick Toohey (in picture on right) at July's 54th Annual Health Physics Society meeting (in Minneapolis, MN). Dr. James' lecture was entitled "The U.S. Transuranium and Uranium Registries: Reaping the Benefits of Lifetime Follow-up of Plutonium Worker Health and Internal α -Dose." His presentation is available on USTUR's website (at www.ustur.wsu.edu).



Funding Dilemma

Grant Cut ~50%

The USTUR operating budget has been cut for the fourth year running—to about 50% of what we should have received in FY2010. This has necessitated drastic cuts in our research faculty, support staff, goods and services, and equipment for our laboratory. We are doing all we can to find supplementary funding—and our DOE grant office is doing everything it can to help—but, so far, to no avail !

NEW Chairman

USTUR Advisory Committee

The USTUR's Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) meets annually to review and critique our research program, and provide the Registries with guidance. The 2009 meeting was held June 26th-27th at the Red Lion hotel in Pasco, WA. This two-day meeting included presentations of ongoing and planned work by USTUR faculty and staff; a poster session by Idaho State University's (ISU) graduate research students; a presentation on beryllium from Dr. Mike Brisson (Savannah River Site's Analytical Laboratories); and a heart-felt presentation from a Registrant donor's next-of-kin (see also page 4). Mr. Bill Hayes, Manager, Dosimetry and Radiological Measurements Group, B&W Pantex, was elected the new committee chair—taking over from the long-serving retiring chair, Bob Thomas.

Left: Dr. Joey Zhou (DOE), Dr. Herman Gibb, Dr. Dennis Mahlum, Dr. Bob Bistline, Dr. Kay Meier, Mr. Bill Hayes, Dr. Bob Thomas.



Mission Statement

We have re-focused our mission to better reflect current and future national and international research priorities (and funding realities):

- Evaluate health outcomes, causes of death, and life expectancy of former nuclear workers (volunteer Registrants) who had documented accidental intakes of uranium and the transuranium elements.
- Obtain, preserve, and make available for future research, samples of tissues at autopsy.
- Conduct radiochemical analyses, as necessary, to validate and develop new state-of-the-art methods for quantifying tissue doses and their associated uncertainties.
- Apply USTUR case study data to refine dose assessment methods for these internal emitters as the bases for reliable epidemiological studies, risk projection, and credible standards for radiological protection.
- Assess adequacy of historical and current U.S. regulatory controls and practices in limiting tissue doses to workers having the greatest health risk from intakes of uranium and the transuranium elements.

A Donor Family's Perspective

EXCERPT FROM NEXT-OF-KIN LETTER ADDRESSED TO USTUR REGISTRANT FAMILIES

Until April 2008, I had only a peripheral knowledge of the United States Transuranic Registry (USTUR). That changed with the death of my father who had worked at the Rocky Flats Plant for 33 years until his retirement in 1988. I also worked at Rocky Flats for 25 years until the site closure was completed in 2005. Tissue donation to the USTUR was a big deal for Dad. He, as I do, strongly believe that the only way to truly understand the risk from plutonium and other actinide exposures is through objective scientific analysis of the donations from individuals like Dad. He felt his donation would benefit others who found themselves in the same situation that he had been, as well as providing a basis for safety improvements for the generations of plutonium workers that would follow him. My father made a contribution to science and research with his donation to the USTUR, and he expected it would not be wasted. I am sure you as registrants, or the families of those who have made donations would agree. The USTUR is a national and worldwide scientific resource that is currently threatened, because the DOE is apparently unable to provide funding at adequate levels. I believe, as a former production worker myself, and a family member of a registrant that has made the gift of a donation, that the United States Government has a responsibility to current and ex-cold war era workers to continue the mission of the USTUR. I have contacted the Colorado Congressional Delegation several times

about the USTUR funding situation with limited results. But I am just one voice of one registrant family. I encourage everyone to get involved by contacting their elected congressional officials, the DOE, and any other entity that could influence these budgetary decisions. If enough voices are heard, decisions can be influenced, and the existence and mission of the USTUR can be maintained.

Thank you, Mike

Permission to publish granted by author. The complete letter can be found on our website.

Editorial Note: Looking back to the USTUR in 1999!



Not shown: seven radiochemistry laboratory personnel at the Nuclear Radiation Center, Pullman.



Current USTUR staff: Front—Stacey McCord, Tony James; Back—Sergei Tolmachev, Susan Young-Wright, Lorena Parra.

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