

COOBER PEDY TIMES

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RADIATION CHECKS CARRIED OUT

This month the reality of the dangers of Maralinga and radioactivity were impressed on the residents of Coober Pedy.

There have, over the years, been many allegations in relation to buildings and equipment that have found their way from the atomic test site at Maralinga to outlying places such as Coober Pedy, Andamooka and Mintabie.

Amongst items that have allegedly come from Maralinga are Austin Champs, one that is still owned locally and others which have apparently found their way interstate. There is said to be generators, trucks and even cupboards which were removed from the atomic test zone. Residents of Coober Pedy have expressed concern of the possibility of Maralinga washing machines and freezers that could still be present.

Of specific concern was the bulldozer in the school playground which had been fenced off a few



Mr Wally Sphere, testing the bulldozer for alpha rays.

days earlier. The bulldozer which appears to be the same model as that which can be seen in a film clip of a Maralinga work site, in "Backs to the Blast", was of great concern to the Health Commission, as it may have also been used to push survey roads at Maralinga.

After concerted media publicity, the Health Commission was able to send Mr Wally Sphere from the Radiation Control Unit at an earlier date than the planned July visit.



Mr Sphere testing the outside wall of the Community Hall, for radiation, watched by MsKaren Stutley, Ms Carrie Reilly and Mr George Van Brugge.

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COOBER PEDY & MARALINGA

EDITORIAL

The Coober Pedy Times Committee wishes to advise readers that the editorial and articles of this paper are a result of a whole group decision.

"Mr Burke said he believed that some of the radioactive equipment - buried just two metres underground and including LandRovers, trucks, cranes and fork-lifts - had been dug up and taken to Coober Pedy."
[From the Advertiser, April 28, 1984.]

HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU ABOUT MARALINGA ?

"The South Australian Branch noting with deep and growing concern the recent revelations concerning Atomic tests at Maralinga, urges the Federal Government to hold a full-scale and independent public enquiry into all aspects of atomic weapon tests carried out at Monte Bello, Emu and Maralinga sites, including the release of all documents and reports held by the United Kingdom Government, the Australian Federal Government, State Governments and all other government or semi-government instrumentalities.

"If the Federal Government does not establish such a public enquiry within 6 weeks then the State Government shall establish a Royal Commission to investigate and report on the above matters as they pertain to South Australia."
[from a motion, carried, at the Annual ALP State Convention, held Saturday, June 9, 1984.]

"Last night the Federal Minister for Resources and Energy, Senator Walsh, revealed that granules of plutonium weighing up to two grams have been discovered during the current survey of the area by the Australian Radiation Laboratory and South Australian Health Commission experts.

"It is now quite clear that serious plutonium contamination has occurred outside fenced areas.

"Let us remember that we are dealing with an extremely toxic substance. It has been estimated, for instance, that as little as three millionths of a gram of plutonium is sufficient to induce cancer if ingested into the lungs."

[from a News Release, by Premier, John Bannon, Thursday, May 31, 1984.]

"Another businessman involved in the project, Mr R. Goldsworthy, now living in Dalby, Queensland, said: "I spent two months clambering over it (Mustang fighter plane) and my hands and hair became a bit radioactive, but that was all. "I wasn't worried," he said, "After all it was 13 years after the bombs went off."

"While working on the Mustangs at Maralinga, Mr Goldsworthy said he had found other pieces of 'hot' equipment lying around."
[from the Advertiser, May 2nd, 1984]

It's 300 Km to Maralinga.



Path of the main fallout cloud, in the Round 4 1956 series of tests.

"The whole question of the adequacy of safety standards is of continuing public concern in Australia, and particularly in my own State. Community disquiet has been heightened by recent front page reports in Adelaide's 'Advertiser', quoting Mr John Philip Burke, an ex RAF technician, formerly employed at Maralinga, who claims that there were three previously unpublicised atomic tests at Maralinga in 1963. Mr Burke, who is dying of cancer, also expressed his concern that radioactive equipment - including motor vehicles and cranes - was buried at Maralinga and that other radioactive material were subsequently removed to the vicinity of Coober Pedy.

Since Mr Burke's allegations on April 28, other former defence personnel have made similar claims about buried radioactive material in addition to the plutonium removed by British forces in 1979.

I therefore repeat my request that the British Government release all relevant documentation relating to the Maralinga tests, and the policies and practices then employed concerning the protection of personnel and local inhabitants. We are also seeking the location and a detailed audit of any radioactive equipment buried by British forces in the area. I am sure you will agree that if hazardous material remains in the area, then the onus is with the British Government to safely remove it as was the case in 1979."
[from a letter to the Prime Minister of England, Mrs Margaret Thatcher, on April 30, 1984, written by the Premier, Mr John Bannon.]

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Mr Sphere spent ten (10) minutes testing the bulldozer with a radiation detection unit designed to pick up alpha rays. He then went to the staffroom to speak to school staff on radiation. Mr Sphere asked the Channel 2 and 9 news teams to leave the staff room while he spoke. After a brief meeting during which Mr Sphere indicated that there would be a further visit by the Radiation Control Unit, he returned to do a further ten minutes of testing on the bulldozer. Mr Sphere, in response to a request for a radiation reading of the surroundings, said that the reading around the bulldozer was "negligible". Mr Sphere still did not test inside a metal hood on the side of the bulldozer. It is hoped that this test will be carried out on the next visit.

Mr Day, School Principal, said on the Channel 9 news that he'd accepted that the bulldozer was safe and that it probably never was radioactive. He has had the fence surrounding the bulldozer removed.

Of general concern has been the TAFE Hall (Lutheran Hall) and the CPPMA Hall, both situated in the main street of Coober Pedy. Mr Sphere proceeded to test both Halls. He tested the walls and the air conditioning system at the CPPMA Hall and said the radiation level was acceptable. Dr Peter Crouch, Health Commission Radiation Unit, had indicated that contamination of the Hall was more likely to be evident on the roof. Mr Sphere suggested that any contamination which would have been from fallout, would have washed off. However, he did not disagree with the possibility of particles still being "trapped" on the roof.

Mr Sphere indicated that the coat of paint on the walls of the Progress Hall would limit the effectiveness of the meter.

At the Lutheran Hall, Mr Sphere climbed into the roof recess where he tested the bare unpainted roofing materials and conducted tests around the Hall. He tested the walls, windows, corners and joints of each of the rooms.

Mr Sphere indicated that if there had been fallout particles, for instance, plutonium, on the bulldozer and rooves, then it may have by now, been washed away.

These particles could be distributed around the school yard and in fact around the town. A monitoring of the town area to test for ambient radiation levels would be necessary to determine if we are in fact exposed to a greater radiation risk than else where in Australia.

Some parents have indicated that they still did not feel everything possible to ascertain safety had been carried out and would be instructing their children not to play on the bulldozer situated in the school yards.

For the safety of Coober Pedy residents the Coober Pedy Times would support the Australian Young Labor Convention in their call for a "full-scale and independent public enquiry."

The Coober Pedy Times would urge the Government to include an amnesty on all people of Coober pedy to encourage the testing of equipment which may still be a health hazard to all of us.



A Few Notes On Radiation

There are basically three kinds of radiation that could affect us from Maralinga and Emu Plains test site.

ALPHA RADIATION

Generally contaminated particles possibly plutonium from fallout after a bomb test. These particles emit rays only over short distances, for example 2mm, but are most dangerous when ingested.

BETA & GAMMA RADIATION

This is most likely to be found on articles that have been directly exposed to a bomb blast.

Type of radiation	Degree of Hazard	
	Internal	External
Alpha	high	nil
Beta	medium	medium
Gamma	low	high

There is natural radiation all around us - from the sun, air, rocks and our own body cells. Then there is the added man-made radiation from bricks and hospital X-rays.

Above and beyond this is the radiation that could have been put into our environment with Maralinga bomb tests.

The effect of radiation is cumulative - each "bit" of exposure builds up.

No one is entirely sure what the minimum safe level is, nor if there is a minimum safe level.

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