

O'Leary tells of U.S. radiation tests on 16,000 citizens

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The U.S. Energy Department conducted 435 human radiation experiments involving 16,000 people during the Cold War, including tests on aborted fetuses, infants, pregnant and nursing women, prisoners, and institutionalized children and adults, Secretary Hazel O'Leary said yesterday.

Mrs. O'Leary released DOE's final tally of the experiments, which was based on documents compiled during a \$14 million, yearlong effort that involved searching volumes of government records.

She and other top DOE officials acknowledged that about 10 percent of the 435 experiments had a "dark side," including the now-notorious experiment in which 18 persons were injected with pluto-

nium without their knowledge or consent during the late 1940s.

The group of experiments uncovered most recently by DOE involved numerous instances in which prisoners and children — including mentally retarded children — were used.

But Mrs. O'Leary also stressed that the human radiation experiments advanced the development of nuclear medicine, which has

saved lives and pioneered new treatments for diseases.

The DOE compilation, however, tells only a part of the tale of the federal government's role in sponsoring human radiation experiments from the '40s through the '70s. The DOE list focuses almost exclusively on experiments in clinical settings.

Other federal agencies, particularly the Defense Department,

also conducted numerous human radiation experiments, but DOE is the only agency to release its findings directly to the public.

E. Cooper Brown of the Task Force on Radiation and Human Rights, an umbrella group of radiation survivor organizations, lauded Mrs. O'Leary's effort.

"As extensive and widespread as the DOE experiments are, the task force is concerned that they

represent only a fraction of the overall number of radiation experiments conducted by the federal government during the Cold War," Mr. Brown said.

An overall look at the government's role in Cold War human radiation experiments is due next month, when the White House Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments releases its final report.