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Security and Continued Use of Cesium-137 Chloride Sources and Notice of Public Meeting

Comment On: NRC-2008-0419-0014
Security and Continued Use of Cesium-137 Chloride Sources: Granting Extension of Comment Period

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Submitter Information

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General Comment

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To Whom it May Concern,

I would like to express my concern about possible steps being considered to limit or remove cesium 137 irradiators from academic facilities. I whole-heartedly agree that security related to these devices is an important issue that should be addressed. The first step at our institution was to move them to a non-descript location with secured access available only to authorized individuals that had passed a security clearance. That was a wise and prudent step. Security steps that follow should be equally wise and driven by a rational assessment of risk.

Absolute banning and removal of Cs-137 irradiators would have a devastating effect on research in the field of Immunology, which is the foundation for developing vaccines, understanding and controlling autoimmune diseases, and improving transplantation. Removal of Cs-137 irradiators without having an alternative in place would decimate ongoing research, and diminish the value of the NIH's investment in that research. In my own case, I use the irradiator to prepare feeder cells for T cell clones representing novel T cell subsets likely to be important in mucosal immunology. My research is relevant to development of a Chlamydia trachomatis vaccine. Without an irradiator I will not be able sustain these T cell clones and research being done with them as they are quite fastidious and unlikely to tolerate mitomycin C treated feeder cells as a long term alternative. We don't have an x-ray irradiator, and I have no idea how to translate my current protocols to one. My colleagues who work on bone marrow transplant have issues even more complex than my own if the Cs-137 irradiators were removed.

*SONSI Review Complete
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Whatever is ultimately decided, there has to be a transition period that allows researchers to adjust to any new reality, and there has to be an alternative in place before removing a Cs-137 irradiator. I personally do not believe there is a reasonable alternative for transplantation type research. In that case, a hardened access should be arranged. Upgrading our security should not degrade our nations world-leading research enterprise.