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# The Worry: Germ Warfare. The Target: Us.

By Leonard A. Cole;

**NEWARK**— Senator John Glenn's Committee on Governmental Affairs, which begins hearings on radiation experiments involving human subjects today, should also consider the effects of past and present biological warfare testing on unwary citizens.

Energy Secretary Hazel R. O'Leary, who prompted the attention about radiation experiments, has no formal jurisdiction over the Army's biological testing program. But she might have an interest in an early germ-warfare test. It took place in 1951 near Newport News, Va., where she was growing up.

The Army released an organism called *Aspergillus fumigatus* at the Norfolk Naval Supply Center because most workers were black; for some reason, the testers imagined an enemy might target the blacks at military bases. "Since Negroes are more susceptible to coccidioides than are whites," a report said, "this fungus disease was simulated by using *Aspergillus fumigatus*." *Aspergillus*, further, was known to cause lethal infections.

In 1949, and for 20 years afterward, the Army released bacteria among millions of unsuspecting people. At hearings in 1977, Pentagon witnesses acknowledged that bacteria and chemical particles were sprayed over San Francisco, St. Louis, Minneapolis and 236 other populated locations.

The Army conceded that it had released microorganisms at Washington National Airport in 1965 and into the New York City subway system in 1966 during peak travel hours. The purpose was to see how the bacteria spread and survived as people went about their routine activities.

The Army still sprays bacteria outdoors at Dugway Proving Ground, 70 miles from Salt Lake City. While declaring that bacteria are no longer being disseminated over cities, the Army admits that during the 1980's it conducted more than 170 open-air tests at Dugway. The stated purpose was to evaluate the performance of biological-detector systems.

Utah residents remember that when a nerve-gas agent was released in 1968, it killed 6,000 sheep 20 miles away. Yet the Army fails to acknowledge that its microorganisms can be wafted by winds beyond control and can reproduce quickly.

The Army denies that its bacteria can cause illness, calling them harmless "simulant materials." This has not mollified Utah officials, scientists and medical experts. As early as 1950, there were indications that the Army's experiments might be causing harm. That year, San Francisco was blanketed with bacteria sprayed from a boat offshore. Within days, hospital patients began to develop heart and urinary-tract infections; one patient died.

The Army still considers its test bacteria harmless, though no one knows the extent of their effects. Secrecy about the biological defense program has contributed to a spate of nasty rumors. The most recent involves the outbreak of a mysterious disease in the Southwest that has taken perhaps 30 lives since May. Hanta viruses, the apparent cause of the disease, have been studied by military researchers for years, and speculation has arisen that the viruses may have been connected to the outbreak.

Suspensions could be alleviated if the program were under civilian jurisdiction and truly open. A 1989 Army document claims that all biological defense work is now unclassified. But in doublespeak, it also says the results of that work may be classified.

The Army still neglects to monitor the health of citizens who may be exposed during tests, even while insisting that its bacterial agents cause no harm. Equally disturbing, people are given no choice about being exposed.

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