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CONARD NAMED TO MONITOR BIKINIANS

The Atomic Energy Commission has named Dr. Robert A. Conard of its Brookhaven National Laboratory to conduct routine medical surveillance of the people of Bikini as they return to their home atoll.

Bikini atoll was the site of 23 nuclear tests between 1946 and 1958. The Bikinians were moved from the atoll in 1946 before testing began. In August 1968, President Johnson announced that the Bikinians would be able to return to their homeland and directed the Department of Defense, the Department of the Interior and the Atomic Energy Commission to cooperate in preparing for the return.

In naming Dr. Conard, the AEC is following through on a recommendation of its Ad Hoc Consultant Committee which, in 1968, declared the atoll once more safe for human habitation. The Committee's finding was based on a 1967 scientific survey of the atoll which measured sources of potential internal and external radiation exposure.

The Committee also recommended, as a reasonable precaution, that a routine surveillance of the Bikinians be set up even before their return and that continual checks be made on their radiation exposure status after they are back on the atoll.

Dr. Conard has 15 years of experience in working with the people of the Marshall Islands which include Bikini. He was also a member of the Ad Hoc Committee.

He has explained his role as that of a monitor. "Everyone has a certain amount of both natural and artificial radioactivity present in his body and all of us are exposed to various levels of external background radiation.

(more)

"Though there probably will be some measurable increase in the radioactive body burden of the Bikinians after they have returned and are living on the atoll, it will be very low and is not expected to cause any medical problems," Dr. Conard said.

Dr. Conard has just returned from the Marshalls. While there he visited Kili Island where the former Bikinians now live, and began his baseline studies on about half of the first Bikinian work party which will be going back to help rehabilitate the atoll. The Bikinians are not expected to move back in large numbers for several years.

The Department of the Interior which is responsible for the Marshall Islands, expects the full rehabilitation of Bikini, including rebuilding the village and replanting the coconut groves, to take about six years. Cleanup of the heavy undergrowth and radioactive scrap has begun already under direction of the Department of Defense, Defense Atomic Support Agency with assistance from the AEC and the Trust Territory government.

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(NOTE TO EDITORS AND CORRESPONDENTS: Similar information also is being issued by the Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York.)