

The Sound of Silence Project™

Radiation: The undeclared enemy of U.S. Military Nuclear Weapons Technicians

Rick Workman, Captain (USAF retired)
The Sound of Silence Project, Founder/Volunteer
Re: Cold War Veteran Nuclear Weapons Technicians
[sender's address/contact info]

August 15, 2023

The Honorable []
U.S. House of Representatives
[] Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative []:

We seek your support for the forthcoming proposed draft bill, short title: *"Cold War Veteran Nuclear Weapons Technician Ionizing Radiation and Toxic Exposure Act..."* An act to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish Cold War Veteran Nuclear Weapons Technician Presumptive Service Connections related to Exposure to Ionizing Radiation and Toxic Chemicals.

The Sound of Silence Project (The SOS Project) is an all-volunteer group of veteran Nuclear Weapons Technicians fighting for ionizing radiation and toxic chemical exposure acknowledgement for military members who maintained our nation's nuclear weapons at bases, on ships, and in submarines around the world during the Cold War period.

The SOS Project was created to address decades of veterans' dangerous exposures to nuclear weapons particle and intrinsic radiation or INRAD, defined as: *"Ionizing radiation emitted through the nuclear weapon surface or directly from exposed weapon components"*. It also addresses our use of toxic and carcinogenic chemicals without adequate respiratory and other personal protection. Those exposures resulted in illness, cancer, and other diseases, debilitating medical conditions, and death; and increased risks to fertility, unborn children, and offspring.

Decades of secrecy requirements regarding nuclear weapons ensured we remained an unknown group of tens of thousands of veterans. Those requirements restricted our ability to discuss activities and risks among former service members, and to submit detailed disability claims to VA for occupational exposure to ionizing radiation and toxic chemicals. We were kept in the dark about our true risks, and the nation remains largely unaware of Nuclear Weapons Technicians' contributions in maintaining our nation's nuclear deterrence and defense during the Cold War.

Technicians in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force maintained the nation's stockpile of live nuclear weapons during the Cold War period, September 2, 1945, through December 26, 1991. Ionizing radiation exposures occurred during routine nuclear weapons operations including disassembly, assembly, component exchange, test, repair, modification, transport, storage, and other related hands-on tasks. We were not made aware of the true dangers of INRAD exposure, particularly neutron radiation, nor protected by appropriate personnel radiation safety procedures, e.g ALARA (as low as reasonably achievable).

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does not identify the duties of a Nuclear Weapons Technician as a "Radiation-Risk Activity" nor a "Toxic Exposure Risk Activity". As a consequence, we are not considered a "Radiation-Exposed Veteran" nor a "Toxic Exposed Veteran".

Presidential Executive Order (EO) 13179, December 7, 2000, *Providing Compensation to America's Nuclear Weapons Workers*, addressed radiation hazards with Department of Energy (DOE) civilian employees and DOE contractors. The text in the Executive Order described civilian Nuclear Weapons "Workers"—the subjects of the Executive Order—with distinctively similar dangers as those faced by military veteran Nuclear Weapons "Technicians" during the Cold War. Additional differences included weapons maintenance vs weapons production; difficulties with VA claims in lieu of DOE opposition to civilian claims; the lower number of veterans compared to civilian DOE workers and contractors; and the additional dangers of numerous toxic chemicals and solvents handled by veteran Nuclear Weapons Technicians.

The EO was codified by the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act of 2000 (EEOICPA), Public Law 106-398. Specific exposures at certain locations are not required criteria for compensation, radiation dose reconstruction is not required, and a determination of the probability of causation is not required for those workers.

Please review our project document, by emailed attachment as you direct, that explains the issues and remedies we seek. A proposed draft bill was prepared by The Sound of Silence Project for submission to members of Congress. The draft; version 7.11.2, July 11, 2023; is under review by an organization led by former New Mexico Governor and Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson. Governor Richardson had a critical role in the passage of the EEOICPA.

Cold War period Nuclear Weapons Technicians and our families throughout this great nation seek your support and direct engagement with other members of Congress for the forthcoming proposed bill. The current proposed bill draft is available by email upon your request.

I look forward to speaking with you and/or a member of your staff at your earliest possible convenience. Please acknowledge receipt of this letter.

Respectfully,

Rick Workman