

## Fluoride and the Cold War

[http://www.fannz.org.nz/bryson\\_griffiths\\_3.php](http://www.fannz.org.nz/bryson_griffiths_3.php)

Delegating fluoride safety studies to the University of Rochester was not surprising. During WWII the federal government had become involved, for the first time, in large-scale funding of scientific research at government-owned labs and private colleges. Those early spending priorities were shaped by the nation's often-secret military needs.

The prestigious upstate New York college, in particular, had housed a key wartime division of the Manhattan Project, studying the health effects of the new "special materials," such as uranium, plutonium, beryllium and fluoride, being used to make the atomic bomb. That work continued after the war, with millions of dollars flowing from the Manhattan Project and its successor organization, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). (Indeed, the bomb left an indelible imprint on all U.S. science in the late 1940's and 50's. Up to 90% of federal funds for university research came from either the Defense Department or the AEC in this period, according to Noam Chomsky's 1996 book "The Cold War and the University.")

The University of Rochester medical school became a revolving door for senior bomb program scientists. Postwar faculty included Stafford Warren, the top medical officer of the Manhattan Project, and Harold Hodge, chief of fluoride research for the bomb program.

But this marriage of military secrecy and medical science bore deformed offspring. The University of Rochester's classified fluoride studies -- code-named Program F -- were conducted at its Atomic Energy Project (AEP), a top-secret facility funded by the AEC and housed in Strong Memorial Hospital. It was there that one of the most notorious human radiation experiments of the Cold War took place, in which unsuspecting hospital patients were injected with toxic doses of radioactive plutonium. Revelation of this experiment in a [Pulitzer prize-winning account](#) by Eileen Welsome led to a 1995 U.S. Presidential investigation, and a multimillion-dollar cash settlement for victims.

Program F was not about children's teeth. It grew directly out of litigation against the bomb program and its main purpose was to furnish scientific ammunition which the government and its nuclear contractors could use to defeat lawsuits for human injury. Program F's director was none other than Harold C. Hodge, who had led the Manhattan Project investigation of alleged human injury in the New Jersey fluoride-pollution incident.

Program F's purpose is spelled out in a classified 1948 report. It reads: "To supply evidence useful in the litigation arising from an alleged loss of a fruit crop several years ago, a number of problems have been opened. Since excessive blood fluoride levels were reported in human residents of the same area, our principal effort has been devoted to describing the relationship of blood fluorides to toxic effects."

The litigation referred to, of course, and the claims of human injury were against the bomb program and its contractors. Thus, the purpose of Program F was to obtain evidence useful in litigation against the bomb program. The research was being conducted by the defendants.

The potential conflict of interest is clear. If lower dose ranges were found hazardous by Program F, it might have opened the bomb program and its contractors to lawsuits for injury to human health, as well as public outcry.

Comments lawyer Kittrell: "This and other documents indicate that the University of Rochester's fluoride research grew out of the New Jersey lawsuits and was performed in anticipation of lawsuits against the bomb program for human injury. Studies undertaken for litigation purposes by the defendants would not be considered scientifically acceptable today," adds Kittrell, "because of their inherent bias to prove the chemical safe."

Unfortunately, much of the proof of fluoride's safety rests on the work performed by Program F Scientists at the University of Rochester. During the postwar period that university emerged as the leading academic center for establishing the safety of fluoride, as well as its effectiveness in reducing tooth decay, according to Dental School spokesperson William H. Bowen, MD. The key figure in this research, Bowen said, was Harold C. Hodge-- who also became a leading national proponent of fluoridating public drinking water. Program F's interest in water fluoridation was not just 'to counteract the local fear of fluoride on the part of residents,' as Hodge had earlier written. The bomb program needed human studies, as they had needed human studies for plutonium, and adding fluoride to public water supplies provided one opportunity.

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