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Canard Corrected

Last autumn many newspapers and *Science* [**124**, 882 (2 Nov. 1956)] published the statement of the Medical Examiner of Philadelphia, Joseph W. Spelman, about the death of Kenneth A. Koerber, a physician who had worked in the Medical Department of Brookhaven National Laboratories from June 1947 to August 1948. Spelman attributed Koerber's death to excessive radiation exposure at Brookhaven and stated that his bones contained "1000 times the maximum safe concentration of radiation."

This was a startling statement and one that, if true, would have grave implications for anyone engaged in work in the atomic energy program. The Atomic Energy Commission began an immediate study of the case in an attempt to answer two questions. First, could Koerber have received a fatal dose of radiation while he was at Brookhaven? According to Lee E. Farr, Medical Director at Brookhaven, at the time Koerber worked there construction of accelerators had not begun, the reactor had not been loaded, and no radioactive substances were in use in the Medical Department. Small amounts of tracers for use in biological and chemical studies were in use in two departments. Under these conditions Koerber could not have absorbed any significant amounts of radiation, and the answer to the first question is *No.*

Second, did Koerber die of radiation poisoning? Specimens of his bones and liver were sent for study to Argonne National Laboratory, which is operated for the AEC by the University of Chicago. Elaborate tests carried out there showed an essentially normal amount of radioactivity or, in the language of the laboratory report, showed "appreciably nothing above the activities to be found in contemporary man due to fallout and natural sources." It is apparent that the answer to the second question is also *No.* Koerber's death could not have been brought about by an excessive dose of radiation as claimed by the Medical Examiner of Philadelphia.

We are glad to do what we can to bring out the facts in this disturbing case. As atomic reactors go into action and the testing of weapons continues, we may from time to time expect to read similar scare stories, couched in equally extravagant language. We recommend an attitude of skepticism until an assessment can be made on the basis of the best information available.

Perhaps the best source of current information about the immediate hazards and the control of atomic radiation is the *Twenty-first Semiannual Report* of the Atomic Energy Commission. It describes in detail the steps taken to protect workers in atomic installations and those taken to protect the public by monitoring fallout and by disposing of radioactive wastes safely. Of the many thousands of people who have worked in the atomic program during the first 11 years of the existence of the AEC, 69 have been exposed to excessive amounts of radiation, and of these two have died as a consequence. That there have been any injuries and deaths is regrettable; that there have not been more in so vast an operation is remarkable.
—G. DUS.