the cloud formed by a nuclear explosion, and who died last year from leukemia.

The Ministry of Defense, however, is continuing to state that those who took part in the tests were not exposed to particularly high risks, and it has already rejected six claims for compensation. A spokesman for the ministry said last week that the ministry's position was that health precautions taken at the time were quite adequate, and that there was no evidence to support claims for compensation. "The survey is the only way to put this all on a scientific footing," he said.—**David Dickson**

FDA Assails Safety of Depo-Provera

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) clashed with the Upjohn Company recently at a hearing in Washington on the approval of Depo-Provera, a contraceptive, for use within the United States. Robert Temple, FDA's acting director of new drug evaluations, told a panel of independent scientists that Upjohn had failed to dispel concerns that the long-lasting, injectable drug causes cancer, while company officials said that its sale would result in few risks and should therefore be approved.

Temple cited the results of several beagle and monkey studies financed by Upjohn in which a significant number of animals developed breast or endometrial cancer. "As a general rule, FDA does not approve animal carcinogens for prolonged use in young, healthy people," Temple said. "We believe that Depo-Provera has not been shown to be safe."

Upjohn attempted to refute the test results by suggesting that beagles and monkeys—the standard species for contraceptive tests—are an inappropriate model for human response to its drug. Upjohn said, for example, that beagles are uniquely susceptible to tumor formation from exposure to progestogens such as Depo-Provera, a point that was disputed by FDA. Company officials also said that existing epidemiological studies in humans indicate that the drug is relatively safe. It is used by women in roughly 80 countries around the world.

"It is never possible to say that a drug is absolutely safe," explains Gordon Duncan, an Upjohn research executive. "But all of the studies indicate that there is no major risk associated with use of the drug at this time, relative to the risks of using oral contraceptives or the risks of dying in childbirth after the failure of a barrier method."

Robert Hoover, the acting chief of environmental epidemiology at the National Cancer Institute, sharply disagreed. "In general, the existing epidemiologic studies of Depo-Provera are inadequate and do not establish the safety of the drug," he said. Four studies conducted in the United States and six conducted overseas are in his view flawed because of small sample size, short exposure periods, brief follow-ups, weak or nonexistent controls, and methodological bias. Upjohn and the World Health Organization have started better studies, but Hoover and the FDA say that these studies will not produce useful information for several years.

The hearing took place before a special Board of Inquiry appointed at Upjohn's request after the FDA's decision, under the Carter Administration, not to approve the drug (see *Science*, 30 July 1982, p. 424). The panelists were Judith Weisz of Pennsylvania State University, Griff Ross of the University of Texas, and Paul Stolley of the University of Pennsylvania. Their decision, expected later this year, will be considered by FDA Commissioner Arthur Hayes, who can overturn or reaffirm the previous FDA position.

—**R. Jeffrey Smith**

Schweiker Quits HHS, Heckler Named to Post

The unexpected resignation on 12 January of Richard Schweiker as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) leaves the department's health agencies—particularly the National Institutes of Health (NIH)—without a stalwart and sympathetic defender. President Reagan has nominated former Republican Representative Margaret Heckler to succeed him.

In 2 years in office, Schweiker gained a reputation as an effective champion of NIH in battles with the Office of Management and Budget. He was "vitally interested in our programs," NIH director James B. Wyngaarden said in an interview. Institute officials generally are unfamiliar with Heckler.

Heckler, a Massachusetts representative from the Boston area, was defeated in her bid for reelection by Barney Frank, a popular liberal Democrat. Some observers believe that Heckler sacrificed some votes in the tough race when she accused Frank of being in favor of pornography because he supported efforts to restrict "adult bookstores" and the like to certain downtown areas. She similarly interpreted a position Frank took on criminal sentencing as making him soft on rape. "The ghost of Joe McCarthy must be grinning," columnist Anthony Lewis wrote in the *New York Times* on 18 October. "What is so puzzling is that Margaret Heckler would want to get into right-wing gutter politics," Lewis said. "She has served eight terms in the House of Representatives, never in a leadership role but respectable and generally liked."

Wide World Photos

Heckler, Reagan, and Schweiker

As a member of Congress, Heckler served on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, the Joint Economic Committee, and, recently, on the Committee on Science and Technology. During the past year, Heckler, usually a strong Reagan follower, voted against the MX missile and for the nuclear freeze. She takes pride in her role in getting the Veterans Administration to establish 15 centers on aging. A graduate of two Roman Catholic institutions (Albertus Magnus College in New Haven and Boston College law school), Heckler opposes abortion but is also against a constitutional amendment to stop it.

—**Barbara J. Culliton**