

THE REDFERN INQUIRY:

Unauthorised Testing of Tissues and Retention of Organs of Nuclear Test Veterans.

The Redfern Inquiry was announced on the 18th April 2007 by Alistair Darling, then Secretary of State, for the Department of Trade and Industry. Its purpose is to investigate whether the removal, retention, testing and disposal of organs of nuclear employees was conducted in compliance with the legal requirements in force at the time.

The Inquiry was originally to focus on the British Nuclear Fuel Group, Sellafield and other UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) sites. However since that time the UKAEA and the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) have begun to examine their records to identify if tests on autopsy tissues were carried out on any of their sites for which they are, or have been responsible, other than Sellafield. The UKAEA have confirmed that they believe that such work was carried out at Harwell at least in the early 1980's, and possibly at other UKAEA sites, potentially involving work related to individuals who had not been employed at nuclear sites.

The AWE have also confirmed that they believe that there could have been additional testing on their employees. This has extended the scope of the Inquiry so that it may now look into the possibility of unauthorised testing or retention of organs by the AWE on Ministry of Defence (MOD) personnel for example, service personnel involved in any nuclear testing or any use of nuclear weapons and this could potentially include Gulf War 1 veterans as they were involved in the use of depleted uranium munitions.

Hilary Meredith Solicitors are a law firm with an excellent reputation for the investigation of the Ministry of Defence and subsequently making them accountable for their actions and as a result the Chairman of the Inquiry Michael Redfern QC, has asked Hilary Meredith to assist the Inquiry with investigations into whether MOD service personnel have been subject to unauthorised testing by the AWE.

The current scope of the enquiry is for incidents occurring between 1961 and 1992 however the Redfern Inquiry is interested to see how far our investigation take us and we will therefore consider all enquiries from Gulf War 1 veterans or their families. We are also aware than the tissue sampling and organ retention could potentially apply to children or grandchildren of service personnel as research has shown that the offspring of nuclear test veterans often suffer with more congenital abnormalities. We are interested in enquiries in this regard also.

If you are currently unaware as to whether this situation affects you or your family then you can enquire directly with the AWE at Aldermaston and the local hospital where your relative died. Ask whether a post mortem was carried out and whether any organs/tissue samples were retained. Once you have had a response and you would like your relative's case investigating then please contact us.

Readers must be aware that they should not be deterred by a negative or what can seem like a final response from the AWE or local hospital. If you are not satisfied with the response you receive from the AWE or the hospital then please let us know. One factor to be aware of when considering whether you have potentially been affected is, for example, if your relative's body was kept for a longer period than usual prior to being released to the family.

If you know of a serviceman who was present at any nuclear testing and who has subsequently died and had an unauthorised post mortem and/or retention of organs then please contact Hazel Madden at Hilary Meredith Solicitors on 01625 547307 or email on: hazel.madden@hmsolicitors.co.uk. We can then, subject to your consent, officially investigate the case as part of the inquiry. The results of the Inquiry will be published in Parliament although you can remain anonymous.

It is not yet known as to whether families who have suffered as a result of unauthorised post mortem and organ retention procedures will be entitled to compensation. I think it is unlikely however should the Inquiry make the recommendation that compensation should be awarded then Parliament may consider this but it cannot be guaranteed.

If you are aware of any information that would assist our enquiries or you would like to discuss this article in more detail then please contact us on the above number. Your enquiries will be treated with the strictest of confidence.

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Hazel Madden
Hilary Meredith Solicitors
Churchgate House
25-27 Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AR