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Nuclear sites made public Firms did weapons work; [FINAL Edition]

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Abstract (Document Summary)

The Energy Department today will release the names and locations of more than 550 companies, research sites and other places across the nation where radioactive and toxic materials may have been secretly processed for the U.S. nuclear weapons program.

Full Text (216 words)

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Poisoned workers & places; See related story: 02A

WASHINGTON -- The Energy Department today will release the names and locations of more than 550 companies, research sites and other places across the nation where radioactive and toxic materials may have been secretly processed for the U.S. nuclear weapons program.

The list was obtained Wednesday by USA TODAY. Its publication follows a USA TODAY investigation that detailed the government's extensive use of private companies for nuclear arms work.

That investigation, published earlier this month, turned up about 300 private contractors that did weapons work. It also revealed that unwitting workers at many sites were exposed to extreme radiation and chemical hazards and that many companies dumped hazardous waste into surrounding communities.

While the federal plants and labs in the database have been publicly known for years, this is the first time the government has released a comprehensive list that includes commercial facilities.

The list is being released on the day of a House hearing on legislation that would for the first time provide government compensation to weapons workers with illnesses linked to exposure to radioactive and toxic material. It's likely to raise questions about whether the bill, which mainly promises aid to workers at federal sites, should provide more guarantees of coverage for workers at the private facilities.

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