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# U.S. leery about arms workshop

By David Evans 2773  
Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON—The Energy Department is pressuring its scientists not to attend privately sponsored meetings on the problems of nuclear weapons testing and warhead disposal out of a concern that their personal remarks could complicate official negotiations.

The latest example involves a two-day unofficial conference convened in Washington to address the next great frontier in arms control—the dismantling of nuclear warheads and disposal of their nuclear explosives.

The Soviet government sent a delegation, while the U.S. Department of Energy did not permit its scientists to participate.

“A number of Livermore and Los Alamos scientists wanted to attend . . . but the Energy Department nixed it,” complained Frank Von Hippel, chairman of the research arm of the Federation of American Scientists, one of the sponsors of the workshop.

Von Hippel was referring to the two main weapons laboratories in California and New Mexico, where the nuclear warheads in the U.S. arsenal are designed.

The leader of the Soviet delegation was from their laboratory at Chelyabinsk, which Von Hippel described as “the counterpart of Livermore.”

Energy Department officials defended the boycott policy, citing continuing official negotiations with the Soviets on arms control matters such as warhead dismantling. An official statement released late Friday said, “The Department does not believe it is appropriate to create alternative channels for these important world peace discussions.”

Bill Sutcliffe, a nuclear weapons physicist at Livermore, said, “Although I was planning on attending, this is a more sensitive time.”

“There have been official U.S. and Soviet government meetings, and I understand the argument that our unofficial presence could send the wrong message,” he said.

However, Sutcliffe declared that as a scientist, “I do not like the idea of being coerced and told I can’t go to meetings. The policy is eroding a vital sense of academic freedom.”

“If you go, you won’t be involved in important projects, and that can be crippling to your career.”

The Energy Department policy has changed since May 1990, Sutcliffe said, when he was permitted to attend a conference in Moscow on nuclear testing.

“The trip was paid from the laboratory’s discretionary funds, but I was not representing Livermore or the U.S. government,” he said.

Thomas Cochran, a scientist with the Natural Resources Defense Council, said bitterly, “There’s a pattern of intimidation.”

He cited a conference in Canada last April on nuclear weapons tests and another that same month, sponsored by the University of California at Irvine, on the environmental consequences of nuclear weapons production.

The Energy Department boycotted the Canada meeting and reluctantly allowed only one scientist to attend the California symposium.

After the conference in Canada, John Lamb, the director of the sponsoring Canadian arms control group, wrote the Department of Energy criticizing its decision not to participate.

“If the U.S. wishes to continue [nuclear] testing . . . it would seem to be in its own self-interest to be seen . . . doing everything it can to ensure that testing is done safely, whether that be U.S., Soviet, or any other testing. DOE’s [boycott] decision did not contribute to that impression,” he wrote.

Nukes

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