

**Jeep** Our Jeep Summer Clearance deals are the best on Long Island



2009 Grand Cherokee Laredo 4x4

Rollover Here  
**SUMMER CLEARANCE**

jobs | cars | real estate | more classifieds

today's newspaper | subscribe

traffic & transit

Islip, NY 74°

mobile | alerts | share it

is talking Yankees with Erik Boland in our [live chat](#)

Login | Register  
August 27, 2009

Long Island | Sports | Entertainment | News | Lifestyle | Hot Topics | My News | Video | Find it ...

Nassau | Suffolk | Your Town | Crime | Commuting | Education | Business | Health | Opinion | Real Estate | LI Life | Obituaries | Our Programs

## nassau



nassau 11:28 AM  
Tropical Storm Danny likely to drench LI

long island 38 m ago  
Pols to reveal ZIP codes with most sex offenders



CLICK HERE



Newsday > Long Island > Nassau

[add comment](#) | [rate](#) | [share](#) | [email](#) | [print](#)

# Brookhaven team minimized risks in return to Bikini

August 21, 2009 By THOMAS MAIER [thomas.maier@newsday.com](mailto:thomas.maier@newsday.com)



Bravo test on Bikini Atoll in 1954

On Bikini Atoll, Dr. Robert Conard strolled along an empty beach, a cameraman shooting an industrial film following his every move. On that day, nearly 20 years after the 1954 "Bravo" blast was detonated on Bikini, Conard wanted the world to know it was OK for the atoll's nuclear exiles to return.

THE CROWN JEWEL OF  
*Long Island's*  
PRESTIGIOUS NORTH SHORE  
catering • inn • spa • restaurant

*East Wind*  
CATERERS • INN • SPA  
CONFERENCE CENTER

### comments

[be the first to comment](#)

### popular stories

most popular

most emailed



nassau 11:28 AM  
Tropical Storm Danny may track east of LI



Bikini's residents had been evacuated since 1946, when the first of 23 U.S. nuclear-bomb tests on the atoll began. The biggest of all - the Bravo hydrogen bomb explosion - spread a cloud of radioactive debris into the air that covered the islands of Rongelap and Utirik more than 100 miles away.

By the early 1970s Conard, then head of Brookhaven National Laboratory's medical team in the [Marshall Islands](#), stated firmly that no similar health problems would happen at Bikini when its people returned.

"They should have a very fine village and a good life on the island when they return," Conard said in the film about Bikini's 540 exiled residents. "I hope they will be happy when they come back. The radiation levels on Bikini are so very slight - and so many precautions have been taken to reduce the levels to extremely low amounts - that there should not be any real hazards for these people when they return."

In 1968, U.S. President [Lyndon B. Johnson](#) relied on the advice of government consultants, including Conard, to promise Bikinians they could go home without any danger. "We frankly do not expect any significant level of internal radiation to accumulate in these people," Conard wrote to U.S. officials shortly after the president's go-ahead. "Bikini is entirely safe for their return."

But Conard's assurances of safety soon proved flawed. Just as the Rongelap residents had been returned to their atoll in 1957 after a three-year absence, the Bikini people began to return in the early 1970s. But their stay did not last long. Less than seven years after their return, Conard's Brookhaven team, working under contract to what is now the Department of Energy, reversed itself, rescinding its earlier promises that Bikini was safe to inhabit. By 1978, Bikini Atoll was empty again.

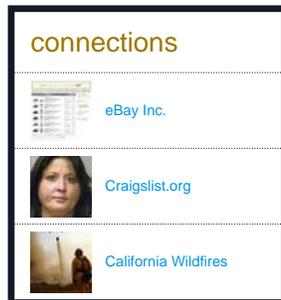
Newsday's review of once-secret Cold War records filed with the U.S. Nuclear Claims Tribunal shows the Brookhaven team minimized the potential dangers in this return to Bikini just as they had done with Rongelap. They also delayed alerting their patients about the evidence of serious contaminants found in their bodies, the records show. The cancer death of an 11-year-old boy, born on Bikini in 1971, was later linked to radiation exposure he received while living there with the people who came back to their contaminated homeland, according to tribunal records.

"A serious error and miscalculation" had been made by the U.S.-sponsored program that resulted in "endangering the health and welfare of the Bikinians who returned to Bikini," the tribunal said in a March 2001 ruling awarding \$563 million in compensation to the island's former residents. The Bikinians later went to a federal appeals court in Washington, D.C., to try to collect that money, but so far have been unsuccessful.

nassau  
Teens criticize cops after being cleared of hate crime



Today, [U.S. Energy](#) Department officials say they and Brookhaven officials responded properly as more information was learned about radiation on Bikini. In April 1978 the Brookhaven team found that radiation levels in those who returned to Bikini were well above U.S. maximum permissible levels. During that time, tests pointed to the dangers of staying on Bikini, including unsafe levels of the radioactive element strontium-90 in the well water and an 11-fold increase of cesium-137, also radioactive, in the bodies of more than 100 people tested. By that September, Brookhaven and U.S. officials decided they must evacuate everyone from Bikini again.



In reversing his stance about Bikini, Conard suggested Brookhaven expand its monitoring program. "What about the need for future medical examinations in the Bikini people now that they have been removed to non-contaminated islands?" Conard asked in a memo to U.S. officials. "From our experience with the Rongelap, Utirik and Bikini people, it is clear that the psychological effects of living on contaminated islands (fear of development of radiation effects; association of nearly all ailments with the radiation exposure) indicate that regular medical checkups on both Bikini and Enewetak people who have lived or are living on contaminated islands are most desirable." Both Bikini and Enewetak were sites for bomb tests.

Still, Conard had predicted the long-term cancer threat among the 143 people living on Bikini in 1978 would be relatively minimal. "One could only expect about 0.005 total cases of leukemia to develop in that population as a result of their radiation exposure," Conard advised.

In that same memo, Conard indicated he would be willing to help provide information about their cancer should they decide to sue the United States for damages. "When cancer develops in these people, which will occur as in any population, U.S. agencies may have to face court claims, and the dilemma of disproving a correlation of such diseases with low-dose radiation exposure will be a discouraging one," Conard predicted.

After the Bikinians were returned to their atoll, one of those who raised serious questions about it was a BNL doctor. "Their blood is taken, they are measured and, at times, subjected to body scans," Dr. Konrad Kotrady wrote in a 1977, 14-page report to BNL. He was a physician sent by BNL to live in the [Marshall Islands](#) and deal with the health needs of people from Bikini, Rongelap and Utirik. Kotrady's contract with BNL was later not renewed. "People indicated that they have complained of certain problems for years and the doctors always do nothing or tell them nothing. Now if an American was to go through this process each year for 20 years, would he also not consider himself a research subject - a type of guinea pig, if you will?"

Kotrady's report went on to question the scientific accuracy of Brookhaven's work in dealing with all Marshall Islands inhabitants. He said in the report that the festering distrust of BNL at Rongelap had spread to Utirik, where a thyroid problem emerged despite Conard's earlier assurances - according to Kotrady - that radiation there "was too low to cause any harmful effects."

Kotrady pointed out in the report that Utirik's residents exposed to the Bravo blast later developed a higher ratio of thyroid cancer than those from Rongelap.

"The distrust the people have for Dr. Conard developed because of the inconsistency when he stresses no problem exists and then, at a later time, an actual health problem arises," Kotrady explained in his report. "The people ask if this thyroid problem has suddenly occurred, is it not possible that the experts have been wrong for so many years and that more problems will occur in the future?"

On Bikini, Kotrady said in the report, the 100 people who returned among the exiled 541 "fear the 'poison' (radiation) that might be lingering on the island." He said Brookhaven's "official policy" claimed the Bikinians received no further radiation because of the earlier cleanup, even though the government's own environmental studies "still show areas of radiation concentration" leading to new warnings about eating local foods.

"Recently, plutonium was discovered for the first time in significant levels in the urine of residents of Bikini indicating the people are absorbing some radiation," Kotrady wrote. "The people fail to understand how scientists can say they do not know all the possible late effects the radiation can cause, that indeed plutonium and other lingering radiation exists on the island such that some foods cannot be eaten, and then tell the people there is no danger and a medical program is unnecessary."

When the physician's report landed on Long Island, Conard summoned him for a meeting at Brookhaven National Lab. In a conference room with about a dozen Brookhaven officials, including Conard's boss, Dr. Eugene Cronkite, Kotrady said he defended his report.

Conard "was very defensive about it, and he took it like the other researchers did - that we're doing these people a favor by being out there," recalled Kotrady. "At the time, they were very adamant that they had done everything right."

Brookhaven's actions at Bikini would further undermine its relationship with all of the Marshall Islanders.

"Here are these islanders, very uneducated, without having any information available to them, intuitively knowing that the place, Bikini, cannot be safe after 23 nuclear weapons explosions, [and] the biggest hydrogen bomb that the United States had ever detonated in their history," said Jack Niedenthal, Bikini's main administrator, whose wife's family lived on contaminated Bikini during the 1970s. "It was their moral obligation to explain this to people. It's very sad that this wasn't being done."

A few months after the second Bikini evacuation, Conard retired from Brookhaven Lab. After nearly a quarter century of overseeing the health impact from nuclear fallout on the Marshallese, Conard left in December 1978, saying much of his work had been accomplished.

That same year, Jendrik Leviticus and his family were living on Bikini when he traveled in June 1978 with some Bikini leaders to testify before a congressional subcommittee in Washington. With Leviticus beside him, a Bikini leader, Tomaki Juda, told the panel, "We simply want and need your help to resettle our community and to let us try to become once again the people we were before the arrival of the atom and hydrogen bombs."

It was the 1982 cancer death of Leviticus' 11-year-old son, Dial, that the Nuclear Claims Tribunal ruled in 2001 was linked to living on contaminated Bikini. The tribunal determined he was exposed to at least 1600 millirems of radiation above background levels during a more than two-year period, which "more likely than not" caused his cancer. Dial developed a very aggressive form of lymphoma. The acceptable level for background exposure at that time was 140 millirems per year.

Today, some 3,700 villagers from Bikini are nuclear nomads, just like those from Rongelap. Niedenthal, the administrator for Bikini's government in exile, said many live throughout the Marshall Islands. Both village halls in exile are next to each other in Majuro, the nation's capital, 400 miles from their homelands.

Unlike those from Rongelap who dream of going back, Niedenthal said the majority from Bikini are reluctant to return despite a U.S.-funded cleanup. They are worried about radiation lingering at this "ground zero" site. "How could it be safe?" he asked.

careerbuilder  
top jobs

clerical      customer service

construction site supervisor

supervisor

enviornmental commercial lines

assistant underwriter

search jobs

[view all](#) | [post resume](#)

stockbroker trainee

[add comment](#) | [rate](#) | [share](#) | [email](#) | [print](#)

### today's top stories



nassau 11:28 AM  
Tropical Storm Danny likely to drench LI

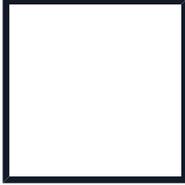


politics 11:43 AM  
Mourners gather for Kennedy memorial

1



BEAUTY DEALS  
Check for New Deals  
newsday.com



Our sites: [Newsday](#) | [Explore Long Island](#) | [Get Local Long Island](#) | [am New York](#) | [Optimum Autos](#) | [GreenStreetLI](#) | [Star Publishing](#) | [Newsday Insider](#) | [Newsday Online Store](#)

Partners: [Homefinder](#) | [Apartments.com](#) | [CareerBuilder](#) | [News 12](#) | [Optimum](#) | [MSG](#) | [Power to Learn](#)

Tools: [Mobile](#) | [Newsletters](#) | [Alerts](#) | [RSS](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Advertise with Newsday](#) | [Place a Classified Ad](#) | [Subscribe](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Contact Newsday](#) | [Advertising Media Kit](#) | [Help](#)

Copyright © 2009 Newsday. All rights reserved.