

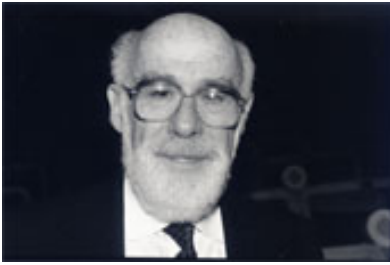


The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

John Gofman (USA)†

Joint Award with Alla Yaroshinskaya (1992)



"...for his pioneering work in exposing the health effects of low-level radiation."

John Gofman

John Gofman held a Ph.D. in nuclear/physical chemistry and a medical degree. Born in 1918, he was a Professor in Molecular and Cell Biology at the University of California at Berkeley. While a graduate student in physical chemistry in 1942, Gofman proved the fissionability of uranium 233 and developed the process with which he and his co-workers successfully isolated the first workable quantity of plutonium and discovered several radioactive isotopes of uranium and protoactinium. His subsequent pioneering work on the chemistry of lipoproteins and their relationship with heart disease received several medical awards.

In 1963, Gofman joined the Atomic Energy Commission's Lawrence Livermore Laboratory as an Associate Director, and was the founder and director of the Laboratory's Biomedical Research Division. There he gradually became concerned about the health effects of low-level radiation and broke with the Laboratory after intense pressure was put on himself and a colleague not to reveal the results of their research in this area. Their subsequent book, *Poisoned Power: The Case Against Nuclear Power Plants* (Rodale Press, 1971, 1979) was a key stimulus to the early anti-nuclear movement.

In 1971, Gofman founded the Committee for Nuclear Responsibility, a small non-profit, public interest association with three Nobel Laureates on its Board. His independent research yielded higher risk estimates from low-level radiation than the estimates funded by various governments. His books showed how his analyses proceeded from raw data to final conclusions, with no hidden steps. His goals were to demystify this field of research, so that people were not dependent on estimates sponsored by governments.

On his *Radiation and Human Health* (Sierra Club Books, 1981), a review by the Journal of the American Medical Association said: "Gofman not only demonstrates his mastery of this complex subject but carefully explains the basic concepts". Another book, *X-Rays: Health Effects of Common Exams* (with Egan O'Connor, Sierra Club Books 1985), was described by the New England Journal of Medicine as "destined to represent a watershed in the controversial field of low-dosage radiobiology", while his next, *Radiation-Induced Cancer from Low-Dose Exposure* (Committee for Nuclear Responsibility, 1990) was welcomed by the same journal as "excellent and timely". It was published in English and Russian. Subsequent works have included: *Chernobyl Accident: Radiation Consequences for This and Future Generations* (Vysheishaya Shkola, Minsk 1994, in Russian), and *Preventing Breast Cancer* (CNR, 1995), reporting research which indicated about 75 per cent of breast cancer in the USA to be the result of medical radiation.

Gofman was critical of the conduct of certain radiation studies, such as retroactive alterations in the

database of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors. To restore the standard barriers against the entry of bias, Gofman called for an independent 'Watchdog Authority' to oversee such studies, including also studies of Chernobyl health effects. Such an authority would enforce the essential rules of good scientific practice: no changes of input after the preliminary results are known, 'blinding' of dose and diagnostic analysts, comparable groups, a credible difference in dose, and no excessive subdivision of data which can render all findings statistically non-significant.

John Gofman died in August 2007 at the age of 88.

Quotation

"Ionizing radiation may well be the most important single cause of cancer, birth defects and genetic disorders... The stakes for human health are very, very high in radiation matters. It is essential that people take no chance that conflict-of-interest is producing radiation databases which cannot be trusted."

John Gofman

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