

60 percent of nuclear cancer cases denied

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Compensation has been denied in 60 percent of 72,000 cases processed by U.S. regulators involving Cold War nuclear weapons workers stricken with cancer.

The Washington Post reported Saturday that only 21 percent of applicants have actually received a check from the compensation program that was unveiled in 1999 by Bill Richardson, who was Energy Secretary at the time and is now governor of New Mexico.

Walter McKenzie, 52, who worked at the Savannah River nuclear weapons plant in South Carolina, was so contaminated that radiation alarms at the facility would typically go off when he walked through, the newspaper said. Doctors later discovered 19 malignant tumors on his bladder.

McKenzie's claim for compensation was denied because he could not access secret government files or sections of his own personnel files. Without the records, he could not prove the cause of his cancer.

McKenzie had sought assistance under a federal program set up to "make whole" workers who were exposed to decades of hazardous working conditions at dozens of U.S. nuclear weapons facilities. A majority of the 104,000 other workers who sought such assistance have also been unable to access records to back up their claims, the newspaper said.

An investigation by Congress accused the Bush administration of trying

to block workers' chances for payment.

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