



STAFF

spotlight

Meet Program Manager Roland Fletcher



One of Roland Fletcher's most important jobs is to protect Maryland's citizens by using accurate information regarding public exposure to radiation. Fletcher, who supervises 26 people in the Maryland Department of the Environment's (MDE) Radiological Health Program (RHP), oversees two divisions: one for licensing and compliance of radioactive materials, the other registering and certifying X-ray-type machines. MDE has the authority to inspect, investigate and require corrective actions. Penalties may be assessed for those who do not comply with radiation protection requirements.

The bulk of Fletcher's crew is charged with making sure that physicians and research scientists using radiation on a regular basis use it properly. "We are proud of the efforts of our

staff of health physicists," said Fletcher. They assure that Marylanders are not exposed to unnecessary levels of radiation. We monitor and require that machines are operating at their best, and that radioactive materials are kept secure. Our radiological health specialists travel across Maryland. They work with health care specialists to assure that patients only receive those doses needed to diagnose or treat their medical problem.

As a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, being Manager of the Maryland Radiation Regulatory Program was a perfect fit for Fletcher. After receiving his Master's Degree in Organic Chemistry from Pennsylvania State University, he acquired theoretical and practical experience in radiation effects. Fletcher honed his skills in detecting and identifying radiation sources from military live source instrument training while in the U.S. Army Chemical Corps. As an Assistant Inspector General, he determined the readiness of troop units in their ability to use chemical and radiological detection and protection equipment. The Radiological Health Program staff provide expertise in the event of an emergency response at a nuclear facility.

"We are the emergency radiation response team for the state," said Fletcher. Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant and Peach Bottom Atomic Power Station hold annual drills to train MDE employees. During drills, teams practice detecting radiation levels in the event of an accident and track releases for possible area evacuation. Fletcher has served on

Roland Fletcher, Program Manager

faculties of several colleges, teaching ROTC students and military medical personnel in Health Sciences.

Of the 5400 facilities in Maryland equipped with mostly dental machines regulated by the RHP, 625 facilities are licensed to use radioactive materials “Most of our licensees and registrants are medical and dental facilities. Some of the largest and most well known hospitals in the country,” said Fletcher. “They use radioisotopes and machines to heal people.” Fletcher is considered a state expert and delivers informational presentations to a variety of county health officers, industrial hygienists and sanitarians.

Where are they using radiation? Not just in X-ray machines. The radiological health program monitors for various sources, including Alpha, Beta and Gamma radiation and X-rays. Specified radiation detection instruments measure exposure, and the personal monitoring badges worn by MDE employees and health technicians are evaluated every 30 days. “This assures that our physicists are not overexposed, and that facilities are doing their jobs properly.”

“What the public should know,” said Fletcher, “is that proper amounts of radiation are used for good and are necessary to carry out healing and diagnostic procedures.” Some Hospitals use state of the art radiation technology such as the cyberknife, which is a radiation machine that treats tumors with non-invasive technology to pinpoint and apply enough radiation to kill a tumor. Another device, a

gamma knife, uses cobalt 60 to pinpoint the intensity of tumor and destroy it without damaging surrounding tissue. As with any regulatory program MDE employs enforcement authority to address noncompliance situations. MDE’s physicists have the tenacity that Maryland citizens expect and need.

Fletcher is particularly proud of his staff. “The staff are people who are well known in the field, even before they came on board with MDE, said Fletcher. “They are experts in what they do. I have the best staff anyone can ask for in the Department. We are completing work that other states require double this staff to accomplish – and they are diligent in their follow-through. I encourage managers and supervisors to develop their careers and guide them with consistent professional development. There’s a feeling of accomplishment in this field – that you are really contributing and protecting people. We are often anonymous – people don’t want to know all that we do. But we’ve accomplished a great deal - they enjoy their jobs and aspire to continue doing it.”

In 2004, Fletcher received the state Gerald S. Parker Award, an honor that recognizes excellence in radiation regulation. He’s been married for 44 years to his wife Yvonne, who grew up across the street from him in Northeast Baltimore. His oldest daughter heads her own company and his youngest daughter is a Head Women’s Track and Field Coach. His two grandsons and, he boasts “a devastatingly charming granddaughter” complete the picture.

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