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SALT LAKE CITY, March 2 (UPI) — So-called "safety tests" at Nevada's atomic testing site in 1957 and 1958 scattered high concentrations of cancer-causing radioactive plutonium across the most densely populated part of Utah.

Gov. Scott Matheson Thursday released documents, including two studies done for the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), which he said indicated the tests produced plutonium levels in Utah soil as much as 3.8 times higher than the average concentration elsewhere.

In those tests, atomic devices were detonated with conventional explosives to prove that a nuclear chain reaction would not be touched off if a conventional bomb hit an atom bomb.

The safety tests showed that a nuclear reaction did not occur, but the explosions scattered plutonium to the wind.

Robert Pendleton, a University of Utah scientist who has accused the government of covering up the health effects of the atom tests, said plutonium is "considered to be one of the most radiotoxic materials in the world — very dangerous because it can cause cancer."

Pendleton said that the plutonium is particularly dangerous in the desert because wind blows it to populated areas where it will be inhaled. He said inhalation is dangerous because plutonium can cause tiny, intense pockets of irradiation in the lungs that may move into the lymph system.

Matheson said the AEC commissioned a survey of

strontium-90 levels in Utah soils in 1971, looking for concentrations of the radioactive material produced by nuclear blasts conducted at the Nevada test site.

He said the scientists were surprised when they found such high levels of plutonium because most of that material is consumed in the nuclear chain reaction from atom bombs.

The governor said maps showing distribution of the plutonium indicate that Ely, Nev., got a bigger dose than any other city.

The documents were found in the files of the state Division of Health as part of recent efforts to uncover information pertaining to the question of whether the atom tests resulted in high cancer rates in Utah.