

December 13, 2004

THIS EVENT IS NOT FOR PUBLIC DISCLOSURE PER AGREEMENT STATE REQUEST UNTIL 12/14/2004

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE -- PNO-IV-04-030

This preliminary notification constitutes EARLY notice of events of POSSIBLE safety or public interest significance. The information is as initially received without verification or evaluation, and is basically all that is known by the Region IV staff on this date.

Facility

Ground Engineering Consultants
Denver, Colorado
LICENSE NO.: CO 586-01
State of Colorado Licensee

Licensee Emergency Classification

Notification of Unusual Event
 Alert
 Site Area Emergency
 General Emergency
 Not Applicable

SUBJECT: LOST SOURCE FROM A TROXLER MOISTURE DENSITY GAUGE

DESCRIPTION: On December 10, 2004, the Colorado Department of Health (the Department) notified NRC's Operations Center of a damaged Troxler portable moisture/density gauge (Model 3440) containing a 300 megabecquerel (8 millicurie) cesium-137 source and a 1.85 gigabecquerel (50 millicurie) source of americium-241:beryllium. The Department also indicated that searches recovered the americium source but the cesium source was missing.

The licensee's employee was traveling on a major road south of metropolitan Denver when the gauge, inside its transport case fell from the back of the vehicle. It was reported that the employee failed to properly secure the gauge in the back of the vehicle. When the employee discovered that the gauge was missing, the employee backtracked and found pieces of the gauge on the road. Upon investigation, it was discovered that the source rod containing the Cs-137 source was missing. (The Am-241 source was still in the shielded device body and recovered.)

The event occurred about 6:30 a.m. (MST), and the Department was notified immediately. The Department promptly responded to the event and started a search and survey for the source. The Department informed the NRC's Operations Center at 3:35 p.m. (EST) of the lost source and followed up with an update at 5:44 p.m. (EST). Attempts to locate the missing source by means of radiation surveys on December 10 were unsuccessful; therefore, the Department's public affairs office issued a press release to inform the public of the missing source and how to proceed if the source is found by a member of the public.

On December 11, the licensee continued a search of the area where the gauge was damaged and some of the side roads. On December 13, the Department sent two inspectors to the site to conduct additional searches for the source. The Department plans an additional press release to heighten the awareness of the risk to the public. In addition, the licensee is considering whether to offer a reward. Leak tests were performed on the found pieces and the results are pending.

Region IV has been following the licensee's actions to date and offered the State assistance.

Region IV conducted a Commissioners' Technical Assistant briefing at 6 p.m. (CST) on December 10, 2004. NRC headquarters, the Colorado Department of Health, and Region IV participated in the briefing.

This information has been discussed with the Colorado Department of Health and is current as of 1:30 p.m. (CST) on December 13, 2004.

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