

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, DC 20555
Phone 301-415-8200 Fax 301-415-2234
[Internet:opa@nrc.gov](mailto:opa@nrc.gov)

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NRC RELEASES PREVIOUSLY CONTAMINATED SITE IN PENNSYLVANIA FOR UNRESTRICTED USE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has released a site formerly owned by METCOA (Metals Company of America), Inc., (previously, The Pesses Company), in Pulaski, Pennsylvania, for unrestricted use following cleanup of radioactive contamination to safe levels.

A license was issued in 1975 to The Pesses Company, a metals and alloys producer, which used thorium scrap alloy, as well as other metals, in its manufacturing processes. (Thorium is a radioactive material licensed by the NRC for commercial uses.) Foundry work with the licensed material was conducted at the company's site in Pulaski, which covers an area of about 22 acres, of which 6 acres is enclosed by a chain link fence.

Pesses used other potentially hazardous materials at the facility, in addition to thorium. The majority of contamination on the site was non-radiological hazardous material.

In September 1984, a routine NRC inspection found the Pulaski facility unoccupied and apparently abandoned. The NRC subsequently found that The Pesses Company merged with METCOA without notification to the NRC. Further, in about mid-1983, the licensee entered bankruptcy proceedings also without notifying the NRC.

In a follow-up to the 1984 inspection, the NRC detected radiation levels considerably above normal background levels on 55-gallon drums, within a building, and on other areas of the site, including some elevated levels outside the fence, but not beyond the property boundary. More than 300 drums, miscellaneous boxes and piles of debris and slag were present within the fenced area.

From 1986 through 1990, the NRC, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and their contractors conducted further assessments on site. An NRC contractor identified radiation levels and concentrations of thorium in soil above NRC limits for unrestricted use at numerous locations on the property. The two agencies and their contractors also conducted stabilization actions during this period, including closing drums that had been left open or overpacking them with larger drums and covering piles of material to prevent erosion.

In 1997, a group of organizations that had sent wastes to the site signed a consent order with the EPA agreeing to remediate the site. Under this agreement contractors worked to clean up the contamination on the site from October 1997 through mid-1998.

Radioactive waste, soil, and slag were shipped to an authorized low-level radioactive waste site in Utah for disposal. Other, non-radiological wastes were disposed of at authorized facilities in New York, Pennsylvania and Texas.

Final surveys by the contractor were followed up with confirmatory measurements by the NRC and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection in 1998 and early 1999. Based on the results of these surveys and measurements, the NRC has concluded that the site has been properly cleaned up and meets its criteria for unrestricted use.

The NRC has therefore terminated the license and removed the Pesses site from the agency's Site Decommissioning Management Plan, which identifies about 34 sites throughout the United States that are contaminated with radioactive materials and warrant special attention to ensure proper cleanup.

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