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NRC STAFF NOTIFIES OFFICIALS IN 50 STATES OF DISCOVERY OF FENCING BARS SLIGHTLY CONTAMINATED WITH COBALT-60

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has advised radiation control officials in all 50 States of the discovery of steel chainlink fencing parts (tension and gate bars) imported from India that have been found to be slightly contaminated by radioactive cobalt-60

The components were imported from the Katia Steel Rolling Works in Calcutta, India to a U.S. distributor in La Habra, CA, Master-Halco, Inc., which then redistributed the bars to branch offices throughout the country for subsequent sales to retailers and wholesalers.

The cobalt-60 is uniformly mixed in the steel and, under normal handling, people will not become contaminated.

Based on actual measurements of the radioactive content of the steel made to date, the NRC has calculated that radiation doses to members of the public or workers actually engaged in handling the material would be very small. Members of the public standing near the fencing bars for eight hours a day, 365 days a year would receive an annual dose of much less than one millirem-compared to an annual exposure from natural background radiation of approximately 300 millirem per year and a current NRC limit of 500 millirem per year for exposures to members of the public from NRC-licensed activities. It is conservatively calculated that exposures to workers handling the material would not exceed about 40 millirem per year.

As a result of this preliminary assessment of the radiological impacts with use of the steel bars, the NRC staff is recommending the following:

action;

1) For tension or gate bars already installed in fencing--no

2) For tension or gate barR in possession of distributors and their branch offices--return to manufacturer or disposal in a Licensed, low-level radioactive waste disposal facility;

3) For contaminated products in the possession of retailers and fencing companies--return not required due to estimated low risk and wide distribution (but low in numbers).

The NRC has been in contact with the import agent, Transmark Sales of Riverside, CA, and with Master-Halco which has voluntarily stopped distribution of the fencing material and has agreed to cooperate with State radiation control officials in tracing shipments to customers.

Contaminated bars have been found at the distributor 8 branches in Fontana, CA, and Portland, OR.

On August 12, radiation inspectors from the State of Oregon found that about 20 percent of two pallets of tension bars at a Master-Halco branch site contained small quantities of radioactivity. The surface readings ranged from a fraction of a millirem per hour on contact for individual bars to about 2.5 millirem per hour for a pallet of about 800 bars.

The NRC is contacting authorities in India to determine if other contaminated fencing material shipments were made to the United States and if other steel products from India may also be contaminated.