

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Office of Public Affairs, Region I
475 Allendale Road King of Prussia, PA 19401
Phone: 610/337-5330 Fax: 610/337-5241
Internet: dps@nrc.gov or nas@nrc.gov

I-97-76

Contact: Diane Screnci
Neil A. Sheehan

July 3, 1997

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NRC STAFF, REPRESENTATIVES OF THREE FIRMS TO MEET JULY 10
TO DISCUSS HANDLING, DISPOSAL OF SIGNS CONTAINING TRITIUM

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives from three companies July 10 to discuss the manner in which three "EXIT" signs containing radioactive material were transferred and disposed of in New Jersey.

In May, a 16-year-old boy removed three "EXIT" signs from a Union, N.J., demolition site, took them to his home and opened one of them, exposing himself and his family's home to radioactive tritium gas. No one suffered any adverse health effects as a result of the incident. However, NRC staff has scheduled a predecisional enforcement conference with representatives of three companies that at various times possessed or owned the building where the signs were installed to discuss possible violations of agency rules and regulations.

Representatives of Pneumo Abex Corporation of Chicago, Selrite Millworks Corporation of Union, N.J., and Carco Construction of Randolph, N.J., will meet with NRC staff at 10 a.m. on July 10 in the NRC Region 1 office in King of Prussia, Pa. The meeting, which will be held in the public meeting room, will be open to the public for observation only.

An inspection by the NRC following the incident determined that Pneumo Abex purchased the signs in 1983 for use at its property in Union, N.J. But Pneumo Abex apparently failed to provide the required documentation to Selrite Millworks and the NRC when it transferred the site to Selrite. Similarly, it appears Selrite failed to provide documentation to Carco Construction and the NRC when it transferred the site to Carco. Finally, Carco apparently removed the signs from the site and either abandoned them or disposed of them improperly.

On May 10, the teen-age boy took the signs from the demolition site and brought them home. While eating a snack in his basement bedroom, he dismantled one of the signs, breaking

several tubes containing tritium. He contacted local emergency response personnel after seeing a radioactive materials label. Emergency personnel contacted the State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, which notified the NRC.

Preliminary estimates indicated that the boy received a radioactive dose equivalent to one year of exposure to natural background radiation. Surveys of the boy's bedroom showed moderate contamination, while only trace amounts were found elsewhere in the house.

The decision to hold a predecisional enforcement conference does not mean that the NRC has determined a violation has occurred or that enforcement action will be taken. Rather, the purpose is to discuss apparent violations, their causes and safety significance; to provide the licensee with an opportunity to point out any errors that may have been made in the NRC inspection report; and to enable the licensee to outline its proposed corrective action.

No decision on the apparent violations will be made at this conference. That decision will be made by NRC officials at a later time.

#