

April 17, 2001

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE -- PNO-IV-01-015

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

Vons Grocery Store
San Diego, California

Licensee Emergency Classification

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

SUBJECT: ABANDONED RADIOACTIVE SOURCES FOUND IN PUBLIC DOMAIN

DESCRIPTION:

On April 10, 2001, the California Radiologic Health Branch (CRHB) notified NRC of abandoned radioactive sources found in a grocery store parking lot in San Diego, California.

The CRHB reported that on April 3, 2001, the San Diego Hazardous Incident Response Team (HIRT) responded to a call involving abandoned radiation sources found in a grocery store's (Vons) parking lot located at 620 Dennery Road, San Diego. A Vons clerk reported that a person told him that a bomb was left in the store's parking lot. The store clerk opened a black case that was found in a shopping cart and then notified the HIRT. The HIRT found a lead container labeled radioactive and determined that no bomb was present. The HIRT's maximum reading on the surface of the lead container was 12 mRem/hr. The HIRT took possession of the source and contacted the CRHB the next morning (April 4, 2001) for assistance in evaluating the radioactive material. The CRHB determined from the label on the outside of the container that Nuclear Associates was the manufacturer. A total activity of 11.8 gigabecquerels (320 mCi) of Cesium-137 (Cs-137) was printed on the lead container label and a line "To Tijuana." No date was on the label.

A portable multi-channel analyzer was used to verify the radionuclide as Cs-137. Radiation measurements were taken using a Victoreen 450P radiation detector. The exposure rates ranged from 10 mR/hr to 28 mR/hr at various locations around the lead container. Inside the container were five small cylindrical sources recessed in the lead container. The sources were about 1/8" in diameter and estimated to be 3/4" to 1" in length. The reading over the top of the open container was 5.8 R/hr. The container was re-sealed and placed in the container that the HIRT team had used to recover the source. The container was then labeled for storage and placed in the HIRT laboratory. Nuclear Associates has agreed to send a shipping container to be used to ship the sources back to them. Nuclear Associates will try to determine the original owners of the sources. There has been no media attention.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) headquarters and their San Diego office were notified by the NRC.

Region IV received notification of this occurrence from NRC's Operations Center on April 10, 2001. Issue of this Preliminary Notification was delayed pending release from the FBI that the information

could be made public. Region IV has informed NMSS, OSTP, OEDO, IAT and the Region's SLO and PAO.

This information has been discussed with the State and is current as of 4:30 p.m (CST) on April 10, 2001.

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