

January 03, 2002

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE -- PNO-IV-02-001

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

Source Production and Equipment Company
St. Rose, Louisiana
(State of Louisiana Licensee)

Licensee Emergency Classification

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

SUBJECT: HIGH RADIATION LEVELS DETECTED ON IMPORTED PACKAGE OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL

DESCRIPTION: On January 2, 2002, Source Production and Equipment Company (SPEC), a State of Louisiana licensee, notified the National Response Center of the discovery of high radiation levels measured on a package containing iridium-192 received by the licensee at approximately 3:00 p.m. (CST) on January 2.

The licensee reported that a SPEC employee arrived at the Federal Express (FedEx) facility in New Orleans, Louisiana on the afternoon of January 2 to retrieve a shipment of iridium-192 that the licensee had purchased from a facility in Europe. The package arrived at the FedEx facility on December 31, 2001. Although the total quantity of material is unknown at this time, a SPEC representative stated that a typical shipment received by the licensee contains as much 370 terabequerels (10,000 curies) of unsealed, bulk, iridium-192 packaged in a Department of Transportation Type-B container. The sources were to be used by the licensee to manufacture industrial radiography sources.

Upon arrival at the FedEx facility, a SPEC employee performed a radiation survey of the package and observed that his radiation detection survey instrument was "stuck." Believing that his survey instrument was malfunctioning, the individual loaded the Type-B container in his vehicle and transported the package back to SPEC's facility located approximately 1-2 miles from FedEx. Upon arrival at the licensee's facility, the individual observed that his pocket dosimeter read approximately 160 milliroentgen. Noting that this was an abnormally high reading, the SPEC employee performed another radiation survey of the package containing iridium-192 and observed a dose rate of 1 roentgen per hour at a distance of 20 feet. The package was immediately secured in the licensee's hot cell facility, and SPEC's radiation safety officer was then promptly notified of the event. The licensee subsequently performed a wipe test of the package for removable contamination and identified no detectable activity.

The licensee is investigating the incident, and has obtained a health physics consultant to assist with their review. The State of Louisiana, Department of Environmental Quality has been in contact with SPEC and will begin a reactive inspection on January 3, 2002. The State has not requested assistance from the NRC at this time.

NRC Operations Center received notification of this occurrence from the National Response Center at 4:48 p.m. (EST) on January 2, 2002. Region IV has informed OEDO, NMSS, and OSTP.

This information has been discussed with the State and is current as of 9:30 p.m. (CST) on January 2, 2002.

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