

January 07, 2002

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

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 - UPDATE

DESCRIPTION: This provides updated information regarding an event which occurred on January 2, 2002, when 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.

NRC Region IV dispatched an inspector to New Orleans, Louisiana, on January 3, 2002. The NRC inspector accompanied a State of Louisiana inspector to the licensee's facility in St. Rose, Louisiana, and Federal Express's (Fed Ex) consultant to the Fed Ex facility at New Orleans International Airport.

The inspectors verified that the package was shielded and secured at the licensee's facility. The licensee performed additional surveys of the package prior to shielding it with lead and concrete blocks. The survey revealed the following radiation exposure profile: 1 roentgen per hour at 15 feet from the sides of the package, 300-400 milliroentgen per hour at 75 feet from the top of the package, and minimal readings at the bottom of the package. Licensee and Fed Ex personnel stated that the package's tamper seal appeared to be intact with no visible damage to the package.

The shipment contained approximately 347.8 terabecquerels (9400 curies) of iridium-192. The package is a Type -B container (Certificate USA/0382/B9U)-85, Revision 9), manufactured in Great Britain (Croft, Model 2835A). The shipment containing the radioisotopes left Studsvik, a reactor facility in Sweden, on December 27, 2001. It was flown by Fed Ex air cargo from Sweden to Paris, then on to Memphis Tennessee. Upon arrival in Memphis, the package was transferred to a cargo truck and driven to the New Orleans Fed Ex facility, where it arrived in the early morning hours of December 31, 2001.

The dosimetry badges worn by the two pilots who flew the package from Paris, France, to Memphis, Tennessee, (approximately 11 hours) were processed and indicated that the pilots received 0.75 millisievert (mSv) (75 mrem), and 0.05 mSv (5 mrem), respectively, for the reporting periods. The consultant for Fed Ex indicated that these readings were within the range routinely observed for these pilots. Based upon information obtained thus far, including the radiation exposure profile, interviews with workers, and time and motion studies, the consultant to Fed Ex believes that the maximally exposed individuals were Fed Ex package handlers in New Orleans and probably received a dose of no more than 2 rem (20 mSv). Fed Ex's consultant continues to assess the event and plans to perform additional dose assessments for individuals throughout Fed Ex's system.

A press release about the shipment was made on January 4, 2002, by Studsvik.

The State of Louisiana continues to investigate this event and NRC Region IV continues to coordinate with the U. S. Department of Transportation, the U. S. Customs Service, and the State of Louisiana.

This information has been discussed with the State and is current as of 2:00 p.m. (CST) on January 7, 2002. Region IV has informed OEDO, NMSS, and OSTP.

CONTACTS: Mark R. Shaffer
817-860-8287

Michael Fuller
817-860-8164