

Telephone Conversation Record 10/30/92

10:20 AM: Tom Sawicki, Plum Island radiation Protection Officer  
516-323-2500

There was/is no leak of radioactive material (or any other hazard) into Long Island Sound; there is no leak into or from the sewer system on Plum Island; there are no airborne leaks.

Last thursday (October 22) in the evening, during a routine "wipe" survey of a prep room in Building 101 on Plum Island, a laboratory technician discovered contamination of the floor with phosphorus-32 (P-32). He notified his supervisor, who advised him to contact the site RPO, Tom Sawicki on Friday morning. The RPO was in an all-day meeting, but left the meeting to investigate the report. He confirmed the presence of two contaminated areas (each appr. 25" by 32") on the floor measuring about 100 counts per minute (cpm) with a pancake GM detector, identified the clean zone, and confirmed that no contamination had been tracked outside of the room. He placed nylon-backed absorbent pads over the two spill areas, secured the room so no one else could enter, and posted it as a contaminated area. Having assessed the extent of contamination and determining that the room would not be needed for use for several days, he returned to his meeting on Friday. No work was done in the room on Monday because he was involved in a transfer of biological materials from Kennedy Airport to Plum Island on that day. On Tuesday, the RPO completed surveying and cleaning the spill areas. Because material was not able to be completely removed, plexiglass covers were made and sealed in place with silicon caulk. Radiation levels are at background in the room.

The spill most likely resulted during a laboratory procedure (mapping of DNA-type material in a procedure known as "blotting") performed in the room using 50 microcuries of P-32 in 5 milliliters of liquid carrier. In part of the procedure, the materials are sealed in a plastic bag. Occasionally, during the removal of air and sealing of the bag, small aerosol-type drops of the mixture may escape. The responsible researcher and the RPO are meeting with the laboratory staff to discuss the contamination incident, and remind everyone of the need to survey after all procedures.

The RPO notified the USDA Radiation Safety Staff of the incident on the morning of October 30, 1992.

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The USDA Plum Island facility was inspected by 4 EPA representatives on Thursday, October 29, 1992. Two inspectors reviewed the site's RCRA program, 2 reviewed their effluent monitoring program.

The RPO verified that no incinerations are being performed of radioactive material at this time; none since June, 1992.

The RPO verified that no radioactive material has been used in animals at Plum Island in the 13 years that he has been employed there. There is no indication of radioactive material being used

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in animals in site records from time prior to his employment.

The local news ran a television story about local area people becoming ill from viruses from Plum Island on Thursday 10/29 and will run a second story tonight (Friday 10/30) about the same issue.

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Telephone Conversation with Dr. Robert (Bob) Powitz, Director, Plum Island Safety Office  
10/30/92, 10:40 am 516-323-2500

He described the same EPA inspection as did Tom Sawicki. Also stated that they have been inspected by the NRC, an EPA contractor, OSHA, and the State of New York this summer. The OSHA inspection is continuing.

He stated that any calls can be referred to himself or to Dr. Jerry Crawford, the Deputy Area director for Plum Island. He would like to continue to be made aware of inquiries about the site.

I told him that we have responded to questions from the EPA, State of New York, and the media about our inspection in July: that I stated that animal work with RAM has not been done in many years; that incineration was stopped in June but that only small quantities were burned a few times a month, and that all releases were less than NRC limits; and that no violations of NRC or USDA requirements were cited at the Plum Island facility. I had also related this information to Sawicki.

Powitz stated that they do not plan to routinely incinerate radioactive material in the future, may incinerate a batch of radioactive waste in the near future, when enough has accumulated to make a complete load for the incinerator.

Betsy Ullrich 10/30/92