

THIS EVENT IS NOT FOR PUBLIC DISCLOSURE PER AGREEMENT STATE REQUEST UNTIL 08/29/03.

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE -- PNO-IV-03-039

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

Phelps-Dodge, Inc.
Baghdad, Arizona

License No. AZ-13-005
Docket No. N/A

Licensee Emergency Classification

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

SUBJECT: FAILURE OF FIXED GAUGING DEVICE TO RETRACT INTO THE SHIELDED POSITION

DESCRIPTION:

On August 25, 2003, the Arizona Radiation Regulatory Agency (ARRA) received written notification from Phelps-Dodge, Inc., an Arizona licensee, of the failure of a fixed gauge. The licensee reported that a Thermo-Measure Tech Model 5031-L (S/N B43) fixed insertion gauge, containing a 111 Gigabecquerel (3.0 curie) cobalt-60 source (assay October 2001) mounted in a vessel filled with fluids, had failed to retract. The licensee reported that the sealed source had become disconnected inside the guide tube located within the vessel. The ARRA has not yet determined the exact date and time the source disconnect occurred or the type of fluid contained in the vessel.

The licensee's radiation safety officer is monitoring the situation. Radiation surveys conducted by the licensee confirm a maximum exposure rate detectable on any surface of 0.8 millirem per hour. The licensee indicated that most areas surveyed were less than 0.5 millirem per hour. The disconnected source is in the process leaching vessel in a position that allows the licensee to continue to use it to monitor fill level in the vessel. The licensee has assured the ARRA that they will maintain sufficient fill levels in the vessel to provide adequate shielding.

The gauge manufacturer plans to remove the source on October 20, 2003, and ARRA staff plan to be on site to oversee the source retrieval process.

An ARRA inspector will be dispatched to the licensee's facility on August 28, 2003, to investigate the situation and conduct confirmatory measurements.

NRC Operations Center received notification of this occurrence from the licensee at 6:22 p.m. (EDT) on August 25, 2003. Region IV has informed NMSS, OEDO and OPA. The ARRA will notify the NRC of additional information as it develops.

This information has been discussed with the ARRA and is current as of 1:50 p.m. (CDT) on August 26, 2003.

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