

January 8, 1960

MEMORANDUM REPORT

**CURTISS-WRIGHT CORPORATION, CHERRYHILL, PENNSYLVANIA -  
ALLEGED POLLUTION OF CREEK WATERS**

This inquiry was conducted at the request of Mr. E. L. Price, Director, Division of Licensing and Regulation, Washington, as a result of a letter dated December 14, 1959, from Mr. Ross Leffler, Assistant Secretary, Department of Interior, Washington, to which was attached a copy of a letter dated December 3, 1959, from Mr. Tom H. McKinney of the Mosquito Creek Sportsmen's Association, Frenchville, Pennsylvania. Mr. Leffler requested that the matter be handled in a confidential manner and that he be apprised of the results of the inquiry.

The letter written by Mr. McKinney to Mr. Leffler states that certain information had come to him from several people over a number of months concerning carelessness in the handling of flammable material and the dumping of concentrated waste into Mosquito Creek, a tributary of the Susquehanna River. He requested that inquiry be made concerning the situation by the Atomic Energy Commission and stated that he would cooperate in any investigation performed. He said that in each case he had pledged his informant to secrecy until such time as an inquiry was launched, and that any publicity given to this matter could be very harmful and possibly create some panic.

On December 31, 1959, E. B. Johnson, Assistant Director for Investigations, Division of Inspection, in response to a written request, received a telephone call from Mr. McKinney. Mr. McKinney related that the source of his information was very confidential, but that his informant would cooperate on this basis. Mr. McKinney said that he had been informed that Curtiss-Wright Corporation removes beryllium from the plant in plastic bags, some of which had burst and released material. He said that Curtiss-Wright allegedly washes contaminated clothing in Mosquito Creek in the evenings until all contamination is removed. He stated that he was told that two children swimming in Mosquito Creek became ill, and that one child developed hepatitis and the other one fully recovered.

Mr. McKinney advised that he has always been active in conservation work and is presently living in the woods about five miles

from Freshville where he engaged in writing and carrying on his own conservation program. He stated that he is perturbed about the situation and realizes that the community needs the Curtiss-Wright plant, but that he feels that its operation should be safe as far as the surrounding populace is concerned.

Mr. McKinney explained that he has no first hand knowledge concerning this matter and has never seen the Curtiss-Wright research site. Mr. McKinney was told that the AEC has made technical surveys of the Curtiss-Wright plant and had not found any violation of safety and health practices and that it was extremely unlikely that their operation would have resulted in the pollution of any adjacent waters.

The confidential informant, who will be identified as Mr. Jones this not being his correct name, was interviewed by the writer on January 6, 1959. Mr. Jones stated that he has lived in the general area of the Curtiss-Wright plant all of his life and that most of the persons in the area are employed in some manner in strip coal mining operations, although some of them work in laboring capacities at the Curtiss-Wright plant. He added that he has known Mr. McKinney for several years and that the latter is extremely interested in conservation work and is the head of the local sportsmen's association.

Mr. Jones stated that Mr. McKinney had talked about the possible pollution of creek waters adjacent to the plant with a number of persons in the community, and that he is not quite sure why Mr. McKinney furnished his name as a primary source of information. He said that he has no actual knowledge of the plant operations and has never seen the research site, and that all of his information is based strictly on rumor and hearsay. He stated that the area is composed of isolated and closely knit communities and it is only natural that the inhabitants discuss the plant and speculate about its operation when they gather at the bar or grocery store in the evenings or when it is not possible to work due to weather conditions. He added that he has engaged in such discussions, but he is not able to name any person in the community who has actual knowledge of the plant and its operations.

Mr. Jones stated that in July 1959 it was spread through the community that two boys, names unknown to him, developed a rash after swimming in Hoagite Creek in the vicinity of the plant. He stated that the boys were treated by Dr. Bibeaux of Snow Sho, Pennsylvania, who allegedly told them that the rash had developed from pollution of the water of Hoagite Creek and that they should stay out of it.

He said that as far as he knows the boys suffered no serious ill effects, but that this alleged incident had caused considerable concern in the community and had lead to most of the speculation relative to pollution of the waters.

Mr. Jones stated that the streams in the area have nearly all been ruined for fishing due to sulphur from strip mining operations, and that about the only places left where fish can be caught are the streams in the Curtiss-Wright plant area and their tributaries. He said, however, that while the people in the community enjoy fishing in these waters, they seldom will eat the fish they catch due to the suspicion that the waters have been polluted by the plant operations and the fish therefore probably are not fit for consumption. He added that he shares this suspicion and would be very dubious about eating fish caught in waters adjacent to the plant.

Mr. Jones said that there is also rumor that Curtiss-Wright makes contamination from sludging and other material and that the wash water is discharged into the creek. He said that he also had heard that Curtiss-Wright removes beryllium from the plant in plastic bags and in some instances the bags had broken and material was released and when it was gathered up it was released into the creek. He continued that he has a friend who is a janitor at the research site, and this friend told him that Mr. Bass, a scientist at the plant, had assured him that the plant waste was disposed of in a safe and controlled manner and that the rumors concerning pollution of the waters were utterly without foundation. He said that, according to his janitor friend, Mr. Bass stated that a certain amount of fission-able material could be placed in water without harmful effects to fish or humans and that any discharges into adjacent waters were at least ten times below the permissible level.

Mr. Jones is about 35 years of age and appears quite intelligent and was very inquisitive about atomic energy matters, particularly as related to waste materials. It was explained to him, in non-technical terms, that the AEC has always been very cognizant of the safety and health of its employees and all citizens and exercises very stringent controls over the disposal of all waste materials. It was also explained to Mr. Jones that particular attention has been paid to waters in the United States in order to be sure that marine life is not adversely affected inasmuch as in parts of the country many persons obtain their living from fishing. He was also told that inspections had been made of the Curtiss-Wright operations

and that no incident had been disclosed which indicated that there was any danger to the safety and health of any persons in the community.

It appears doubtful that Mr. Jones was completely convinced inasmuch as following the foregoing conversation he was again asked whether he had changed his mind as to the edibility of the fish from the waters adjacent to the plant and he remarked that he would still be dubious about eating these fish.

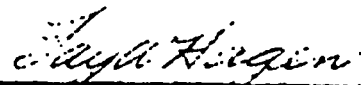
Mr. Jones could make no suggestion as to how the people in the community could be assured of the safety of the plant operations, and he expressed the opinion that this would be difficult due to the lack of knowledge on their part and the difficulty of disseminating information due to the fact that the residents are widely scattered. The general conversation with Mr. Jones also indicated that opinions formed by persons in his community would be difficult to change, particularly since they cannot understand technical matters and know only that atomic energy has a potential for serious health hazards.

An initial inspection of Curtiss-Wright Corporation, Quakertown, Pennsylvania, on March 4 and 5, 1958, revealed that the only items of noncompliance found were related to the use of proper caution signs, labels and signals.

On December 22, 1959, Mr. K. T. Beam, Health Physicist at the Curtiss-Wright site, informed Dr. F. A. Morris, Inspection Specialist, Office of Compliance, Division of Inspection, by telephone that discharges of radioactive liquid materials had been carefully treated at the Waste Treatment Plant and were well within the values allowed by 10 CFR Part 20 for unrestricted areas. Further, that Mr. Beam stated that the activity discharged probably arose from decontamination and laundry activities and is thought by him to be mostly Cobalt 60 and Iridium 192, and that no detectable alpha activity had been observed.

A check with the Divisions of Research, Military Application, Reactor Development and Production revealed no contracts in existence with Curtiss-Wright Research and Development Center at Quakertown, Pennsylvania.

In view of the foregoing there appears to be no need for further inquiry by this office at this time.

  
Fay W. Egan

Period of Investigation:  
January 6, 1960