

June 17, 2003

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE -- PNO-III-03-027

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 III staff on this date.

Facility

United States Enrichment Corporation
Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant
Paducah, Kentucky

License No: GDP-1

Licensee Emergency Classification

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

SUBJECT: FIRE IN FLUORINE FACILITY

DESCRIPTION:

At 2:00 p.m. on June 16, 2003, an inadvertent release of fluorine occurred during routine valving operations. A five-pound bottle of fluorine was being emptied into larger storage tanks when a piping connection failed. The workers who were opening the valve between the bottle and the tank immediately exited the building. One of the workers tripped while exiting the building and received minor abrasions.

The leaking fluorine ignited, and the resulting fire consumed about six feet of the piping.

The leak was terminated when an on-site hazardous material response team, in protective gear, manually closed the isolation valves between the five-pound bottle and the tanks. A check valve should have prevented fluorine from the tanks leaking back into the supply header, but leakage through the valve allowed fluorine to escape through the failed piping connection.

The certificatee determined that approximately 100 pounds of fluorine was released. This amount exceeded the reportable quantity of 10 pounds, and the certificatee reported the release to the State of Kentucky and the National Response Center.

The licensee is investigating the cause of the fluorine release and fire.

The NRC Resident Inspectors monitored the certificatee's response to the incident.

The information in this preliminary notification has been reviewed with certificatee management. There has been news media interest in the fluorine release and fire. The certificatee is responding to news media inquiries.

The certificatee notified the NRC Operations Center of this event at 6:45 p.m. (CDT) on June 16, 2003. This information is current as of 9:00 a.m. on June 17, 2003.

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