

September 11, 2006

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE -- PNO-IV-06-011

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

FMC Idaho LLC
Pocatello, Idaho
Docket No.: 030-32191
License No.: 11-27071-01
(Terminated License)

Licensee Emergency Classification

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

SUBJECT: NUCLEAR GAUGE FOUND IN SHIPMENT OF SCRAP METAL

DESCRIPTION: On September 7, 2006, the Oregon Radiation Protection Services Section of the Department of Human Services (the Department) reported that a Texas Nuclear gauge containing approximately 9.25 gigabecquerel (250 millicurie) of cesium-137 (current activity) had been found in a rail shipment of scrap metal (EN 42833). Department staff recovered the gauge. NRC Region IV was informed by Department management that the unshuttered gauge radiation levels were 5.2 millisievert/hour (520 millirem/hour) at 1-foot from the source. Department management also reported that the scrapyards (Cascade Steel) workers properly responded to a portal alarm and that radiation doses to those individuals were estimated to be less than 0.2 millisievert (20 millirem). Thermo MeasureTech (formerly Texas Nuclear) has examined the device and determined that the shutter had been sheared off the gauge. Thermo MeasureTech is working with Oregon to safely dispose of the gauge.

Information obtained by Oregon indicated that the gauge was last owned by Astaris, LLC and was associated with an elemental phosphorus facility located in Pocatello, Idaho. Review of NRC records showed that NRC License No. 11-27071-01 was issued to Astaris-Idaho LLC in Pocatello, Idaho, and authorized the possession of Texas Nuclear gauges. The NRC license was transferred to FMC Idaho LLC in 2002, and terminated in 2003. The phosphorus facility is currently being dismantled. The shipment that set off the alarm came from Pacific Hide and Fur Recycling Co., also located in Pocatello, who is processing the materials removed from the facility for shipment. Six more train car loads of scrap metal from the Idaho facility are expected to arrive at Cascade Steel later this week. Oregon plans to survey each car upon arrival to determine if any radioactive sources are in the scrap metal.

NRC Region IV contacted Thermo MeasureTech, FMC officials at the phosphorus facility, and Pacific Hide and Fur. Pacific Hide and Fur stated that all material received from the facility is scanned and surveyed for radioactivity. FMC indicated that all process equipment has been removed from the phosphorus facility and that primarily only empty buildings remain onsite. Records available from Thermo MeasureTech indicate that as many as six devices distributed to the Pocatello facility were not returned to them for disposal.

Region IV is continuing efforts to reconcile FMC's gauge disposition. A Region IV inspector, accompanied by a health inspector from the state of Idaho, will perform site visits at the FMC and Pacific Hide and Fur facilities the week of September 11.

Region IV received notification of this occurrence from the state of Oregon on September 7, 2006. Region IV has informed the state of Idaho, EPA Region 10, and also officials of the Shoshone-Bannock tribe (the facility is located on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation). OEDO, NMSS, and STP have also been informed.

This information is current as of 3:00 p.m. (CDT) on September 11, 2006.

ADAMS ACCESSION NUMBER: ML062540530

CONTACTS: Bob Brown
817-860-8130
rab@nrc.gov

Vivian Campbell
817-860-8287
vhc@nrc.gov