June 1, 1999

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE PNO-II-99-020

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 Region II staff (Atlanta, Georgia) on this date.

Facility
U. S. Department of the Navy
Crystal City, Virginia
Docket No. 030-29462
License No. 45-23645-01NA

Licensee Emergency Classification
Notification of Unusual Event
Alert
Site Area Emergency
General Emergency
X Not Applicable

SUBJECT: PRESS INTEREST IN EVENT INVOLVING DEPLETED URANIUM AMMUNITION

On May 28, 1999, Region II received press inquiries regarding a February 19, 1999 event in which depleted uranium (DU) ammunition was inadvertently expended on the Live Impact Area (LIA) of the Vieques Naval Range, on Vieques Island in Puerto Rico. The range is a naval weapons firing range and is a restricted area. The NRC was informed of the event on March 5, 1999, after it was identified.

During a training exercise, two U. S. Marine Corps Harrier aircraft expended 263 DU rounds. Each round contains 148 grams of DU in the form of a pencil shaped penetrator. The LIA is located on the eastern tip of the island of Vieques and covers approximately 2.5 square miles. Interviews with the Marine pilots isolated the affected area to a small portion of the LIA called the North Convoy. The LIA is guarded 24 hours per day and only a few individuals are authorized access.

A team of Navy Health Physicists was deployed to the area between March 10 and 19, 1999. The team performed visual and radiological surveys and determined that the penetrators were 10 to 20 feet apart along three distinct paths. A total of 57 penetrators were recovered. Due to dense vegetation in portions of the affected area, the search was suspended because of the possibility of unexploded conventional ordinance. The Navy plans to resume recovery operations in August 1999. The ~~licensee~~ Navy will provide additional information subsequent to this further work.

Region II has been following the Navy's response to this incident and will continue to do so.

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico has been notified. This information is current as of June 1, 1999, at 11:00 am.

Contact: Michael Fuller
(404) 562-4714