

-Nuclear, 4th Ed - writechru, 2277, 890
is: Tops with 12 new grafts to update, moving Hart statements to 7th,
8th and 9th grafts, edits throughout to tighten and consolidate
previous leads and inserts.
Laserphotos HX1,2, LAN1,2, REA2, Map NY24
By BOB DVORCHAK

Associated Press Writer
HARRISBURG, Pa. AP - An accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear
power plant apparently damaged the reactor core and allowed
radioactive material to leak into the atmosphere, the government said
Wednesday.

Officials said their readings indicated there was no immediate
danger to the public, and there were no plans to evacuate the 15,000
people living within a mile of the plant.

Edison Case, a Nuclear Regulatory Commission spokesman, said
radiation levels inside the plant's reactor building registered at
1,000 times normal.

But George Troffer, manager of generation quality assurance for
Metropolitan Edison, one of the consortium of companies that runs the
plant, said he thought that figure was too high. He said the level
was perhaps 10 times more than normal.

Company employees and NRC officials worked at the plant to reduce
the temperature and pressure inside the reactor dome to allow
engineers to enter and check the reactor for damage.

A plant spokesman said "a handful" of workers were exposed to
radiation in the accident, but none was seriously contaminated or
hospitalized.

In Washington, Sen. Gary Hart, D-Colo., said human error appeared to
have been a factor in the incident.

"I am informed by the NRC that the emergency core cooling system
was turned off prematurely - resulting in partial blockage of water
needed to cool the nuclear core and keep it under control," said
Hart, chairman of the Senate subcommittee on nuclear radiation.

"Some human error seems to have been involved in responding to the
emergency situation," he said, adding the NRC had told him radiation
levels outside the plant did not pose a health hazard.

Case said radioactive gases from the plant's nuclear fuel may have
leaked out of the plant, which was shut down by the accident. There
was no word when the electric facility would resume operation.

A statement from General Public Utilities, the consortium which
operates the plant, said there was "some low-level release of
radioactive gas beyond the site boundary Despite this release,
the company does not believe the level constitutes a danger to the
health and safety of the public."

Earlier, the consortium said the accident may have damaged the fuel
cladding, metal tubes which contain the pellets of radioactive
uranium fuel.

The cause of the accident - or the precise sequence of events that
led to the radiation's release - could not be immediately determined.

But Lt. Gov. William Scranton III said steam containing radioactive
material was released into the air for over two hours to "relieve
potentially dangerous pressure" in the reactor.

"The situation is more complex than the company first led us to
believe," Scranton said.

"It the release of the steam was done to relieve potentially
dangerous pressure in the reactor chamber," Scranton said. "Because
of an apparent leak in the primary cooling system, radioactive
material was discharged into the air along with the steam," he said.

Company officials could not be reached for comment on Scranton's
statement, but Leonard Matt, a spokesman for the consortium, said
"Some damage to the fuel cladding may have occurred."

The extent of the damage, if any, was not known.

Case said heat-caused pressure inside the dome had risen temporarily
to four or five pounds per square inch above outside atmospheric
pressure - enough to cause leakage. The leaking gases may have
included iodine and xenon, he said, but not uranium or plutonium.

A nuclear engineer for the state Department of Environmental
Resources, William Dornsife, said the core became overheated during
the incident. "The core was covered. The core was flooded. Something
caused the core to overheat," he said.

The consortium reported the possible damage to the cladding after an

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radiation in the accident, but none was seriously contaminated or hospitalized.

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The consortium reported the possible damage to the cladding after an NRC spokesman said the accident sent radiation beaming up to a mile away through the 4-foot-thick walls of the power plant.

Joe Fouchard, the spokesman, said the amount of radiation was relatively small, adding that what registered a mile from the plant was comparable to that given off during a medical X-ray.

Plant officials had said only a small amount of radioactive steam escaped when a valve blew out on a water pump that cools one of the plant's two reactors. A second reactor was shut down earlier for refueling.

Plant officials said some workers may have been contaminated. "I'm sure some of them got exposure, but positively none were over-exposed," said Jack Herbein, vice president for generation at Metropolitan Edison. The plant employs 500 persons.

Plant spokesman Blaine Fabian said, "There is absolutely no danger of a meltdown. We are not in a 'China Syndrome'-type situation." He referred to a movie that dramatizes the possibility of an uncooled nuclear reactor core melting and burning into the earth.

The \$1 billion plant, on an island in the Susquehanna River 10 miles southeast of here, began operation in 1974.

Dornsife said initial readings showed the amount of radiation that escaped was 1 millirem per hour. But a plant spokesman said readings later increased to 2 to 3 millirems per hour at the edge of the site.

Normally, Americans are exposed to between 100 and 120 millirems per year from such things as the sun and X-rays. A chest X-ray could give a person up to 30 millirems.