

WKYC-TV

1235 EAST MAIN STREET, CLEVELAND, OHIO 44115

March 12, 1975

What follows is a synopsis of the Davis Besse Nuclear Power Plant story as compiled by an NBC Investigative Unit headed by reporter Kevin Boyle. It is the result of a three month investigation. Information cited as fact has been substantiated through that investigation.

- Toledo Edison Company, the licensee for the Davis Besse project
- Bechtel Engineering, Primary Contractor
- Bagwell Coatings Inc., a sub-contractor
- Mr. Charles H. Ridgell, Project Manager, Bagwell Coatings
- Mr. Mark Vining, former Quality Control Engineer for Bagwell
- Mr. Doyle Honeycutt, Chief Investigator, Chicago District Nuclear Regulatory Commission (formerly A. E. C.)
- Mr. Lowell Roe, Vice-President, Construction Operations, Toledo Edison Power Company*
- Mr. Donald P. Tekkell, Public Information Manager, Toledo Edison Power Company*
- Mr. Jan Strasma, Public Information Officer, N. R. C. *

*These gentlemen were among those who participated in the "Cleveland Connection" program dealing with Davis Besse on February 28, 1975.

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The Davis Besse Nuclear Power Plant Story:

Synopsis

1. -The coating at issue is: a teflon-like, epoxy material which is applied to the interior of the nuclear containment building. There is about a 130,000 square foot area to be covered. The coating is one of the materials involved in the project vital enough that the A.E.C. (now the N.R.C.) included it in its list of "Critical" materials.

2. -The coating is not as critical as some of the other materials and procedures on that list, but it is vital enough that the A.E.C. deemed it 'critical', requiring it to be manufactured, shipped, stored, tested, applied, and retested under the most stringent standards.

3. -The purpose of the coating is primarily to protect the steel containment vessel from rust and/or corrosion. It's 'teflon-like' quality also facilitates efficient de-contamination of the inner surfaces of the containment building in the event of radiation leaking into the vessel, and the activation of the Emergency Cooling System. To a minor degree, the coating also inhibits the passage of some radiation through itself.

4. -Among the stringent requirements made of the coatings and their application: that it be a "pinhole free surface", which binds to the surface it's applied to with an adhesive force of 500 lbs. per sq. inch.

5. -Among the things which can happen, if the coating or its application is defective, is that if a failure goes undetected over an extended period of time (years) the steel containment vessel could 'rust' through allowing (in the case of an accident) radiation to escape directly into the atmosphere. Also, we're told, short of that, if the coating was defective and the Emergency Cooling System were put in operation, in the case of an accident, the intense heat, and waterflow of such a situation, could possibly cause the coating to peel from its surfaces and block up the Cooling System.

In either eventuality, a considerable disaster could occur

-Therefore, we re-emphasize the precautions we pointed out in paragraph 2. above. Under A.E.C. regulations pertaining to materials and procedures on their "Q List", Toledo Edison (TECO) is primarily responsible to see that those regulations and safeguards are met. TECO, Bechtel, and Bagwell are all required to conduct their own Quality Control checks, inspections, and audits. They're even supposed to check the 'checkers'.

Precise records of all tests, audits and Quality Control reports must be made, compiled and maintained under the strictest control.

The Quality Control Inspectors must have autonomy and authority: they must be totally independent of those persons whose work they're checking.

-Vining says that during the course of his inspections, he found numerous violations in Bagwell's coating and its application.

-Vining says he reported (10-14 reports) these discrepancies to Project Manager Ridgdell, even though by A.E.C. regs he should not have been required to report to him at all.

-Vining says at first his reports were ignored, disregarded or 'sluffed-off'.

-Vining says when he persisted in citing more violations, he was told by Ridgdell to 'turn the other cheek' and 'don't go opening any cans of worms'. Vining also contends that one night at his home, Ridgdell intimated a bribe by saying, 'play along with me, Mark, and I'll put money in your pocket'.

These alleged statements, or their meanings are, of course, unsubstantiated and open to interpretation.

-Vining says that finally, Ridgdell made one last attempt to discourage him from filing discrepancy reports, and failing, handed Vining his separation pay, firing him.

-Ridgdell contends Vining was fired for being unreliable, for excessive absenteeism, and for "taking off from work to go play tennis with his wife."

-The Ohio State Department of Employment Services investigated Vining's dismissal, and ruled that it was without just cause. They found that Vining was doing the job required of him, and that his attendance record was good.

-Following his dismissal, Vining forwarded his charges to the A.E.C. office in Chicago. As a result, A.E.C. officials held a surprise investigation on the Davis Besse site. (But somehow Bagwell officials discovered the planned inspection beforehand.)

-As a result of that investigation, the A.E.C. cited TECO and Bagwell for violating 10 of the 18 points on their safety criteria.

Among the violations:

- a) Quality Control did not have the independent authority it was required to;
- b) TECO had failed to conduct the safety checks for quality control audit it was required to;

- c) 90% of Bagwell codings were applied with total disregard for, and in violation of, A.E.C. regulations;
- d) and that Ridgdell HAD DESTROYED Quality Control reports.

-As a result of the A.E.C.'s finding, Bagwell was ordered to discontinue this work, in critical areas of construction.

-Ridgdell admits destroying the reports. However, he explains that he only destroyed the original copies, because they were illegible. He says they were replaced with typewritten copies.

HE DENIES VINING FILED ANY DISCREPANCY REPORTS.

-Vining has no copies of those reports to prove otherwise. HOWEVER, he has notations in the personal diary he carried, noting the dates he filed reports, and his encounters with Ridgdell. He also has a letter sent to Mobil Oil Co., questioning a batch of the coatings they had manufactured. And, of course, Vining's coming forward, lends some credibility to his allegations.

-The A.E.C., when questioned by NBC News about these facts, attempted to de-emphasize them. They shrugged off their citations against TECO and Bagwell, as just being technicalities over paperwork and procedures, mostly.

They said they were satisfied that the coatings in question were actually up to standard.

-And so the key to whether Vining was misled, outright lying, or whether there indeed had been an intentional cover-up of dangerous deficiencies and serious malfeasance was to be found in whether or not the coating was actually up to standard.

-If the coating was defective, the fact would strongly support Vining's allegations. If it were flawless as TECO, Bechtel and Bagwell (A.E.C.) claim, then Vining would have been in error. To determine this, a NBC News crew visited the Davis Besse site accompanied by Vining. Vining, Boyle and the film crew climbed a ladder 22 stores to inspect the areas where Vining claimed there were discrepancies. Project Manager, Ridgdell contends that nothing less than the destructive force of a sand blaster or a jack hammer would be required to remove the coatings. The coatings are required to adhere that strongly and yet, as we have documented on our film, certain areas of the coating on the containment wall and other surfaces inside the structure, easily chipped with a pen knife and in some cases we chipped it off with our finger nails.

And so the coating in some areas is defective. This does mean that most of the coating is not up to standard; it simply indicates that some of it is defective. It seems to indicate that Vining reported those discrepancies to Ridgdell and the A.E.C. and that Bagwell, Bechtel, TECO and A.E.C. Inspectors all failed to find discrepancies which we located in a matter of minutes. It appears that Ridgdell and Bagwell knew of the defects and instead of repairing, instituted a cover-up. If Bechtel, TECO, and the A.E.C. were not told of the defects, they were at least seriously negligent in running their own tests and audits. 90% of the coating involved has been applied in violations of A.E.C. regulations. At this point, no steps have been taken that we are aware of, to remove and reapply the coatings properly. Bagwell will shortly be permitted to resume work on the site as the N.R.C. says it is now satisfied with the revisions made in that company's quality control procedures. Toledo Edison tries to de-emphasize the importance of the coating and the decisions we have outlined by saying that they are not an intrinsic part of the plant's operation. They have stated that a failure of the coating poses no threat to public safety. In response, we refer to paragraph 5. above. In a statement to the A.E.C., Toledo Edison said that Bagwell coating did not have the expertise or the experience for the application of these coatings. And yet they contracted Bagwell to do this critical work and according to the A.E.C. were negligent in monitoring and auditing Bagwell.

In fact, the A.E.C. has stated that Toledo Edison has been negligent in meeting its quality control requirements in general.

There is a real question here about Toledo Edison's overall quality control procedures and whether or not they are meeting the required safety standards.

The N.R.C. states that as the completion of the plant draws nearer, their testing will intensify. There is some question as to how effective future testing will be in lieu of its past ineffectiveness. At this time, there is still no full time N.R.C. inspection staff assigned to the Davis Besse site. The quality of the construction on this site has been entrusted solely to the companies involved in that construction and they are allowed to pass judgment on their own. Serious doubt has been made as to whether or not this responsibility is too great to leave up to private industry operating with near autonomy when the safety of the public at large is at stake.

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