

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION

Handwritten initials and date:
HAB 8/11/80
1655

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE PNO-V-80/64 8/11/80

This preliminary notification constitutes EARLY notice of events of POSSIBLE safety or public interest significance. The information presented is as initially received without verification or evaluation and is basically all that is known by IE staff on this date.

Facility: General Atomic Company
San Diego, California
Docket No. 70-734

Subject: EXPLOSION OF A CONTAINER OF UC-ThC POWDER

The licensee reported the explosion of an aluminum container of UC-ThC on 8/11/80 at 10:30 a.m., PDT. The explosion occurred at 2:00 p.m., 8/9/80. The aluminum container was believed to be inerted. The explosion was caused by a leakage of inerting gas, or by reaction with impurities, or a combination of both. The explosion took place at a weighing station. Approximately 200 grams of U-235 were in the container at the time.

Five employees were in the vicinity at the time. Nasal smears were 94, 96, 103, 282 and 855 disintegrations per minute. Urine specimens were obtained from those five and sent for rush analysis. Eight additional nose wipes indicated less than 18 disintegrations per minute. All employees in the facility have submitted urine samples.

Maximum airborne concentration at 5 feet from the weigh station was 1.0×10^{-8} microcuries per cubic centimeter. The next nearest sample, taken at about 6 feet from the weigh station was 3×10^{-9} microcuries per cubic centimeter. Airborne concentration at about 20 feet from the weigh station was 3×10^{-10} microcuries per cubic centimeter. Those were seven hour air samples.

All employees except one left the area (dry scrap recovery area) immediately. That person remained in the area for an estimated two minutes and is the person whose nasal smear indicated 855 disintegrations per minute. No respiratory protective equipment was being worn at the time.

The U-Th mix was in the approximate ratio of 20/80. The person with the highest nasal smear was lung counted for thorium in a shadow-shield counter. The count indicated no deposition of thorium. The urine bioassay results are expected by 8/13/80.

The material involved in the explosion included finely divided particles prior to spheroidization.

The licensee has initiated an investigation.

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Neither the NRC nor the licensee have issued a press release concerning this occurrence.

Notification of Region V by licensee was by telephone at 10:30 a.m., 8/11/80.

Contact: R. D. Thomas (FTS) 463-3763 W. J. Cooley (FTS) 463-3768

Distribution: Transmitted H. St. 4:25 p.m.
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