

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE PNO-III-90-64 Date September 28, 1990

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 III staff on this date.

*SPM
DOD*

Facility: U.S. Army Armament, Munitions
and Chemical Command
Department of the Army
Rock Island, IL

License No. 12-00722-07

Licensee Emergency
Classification:
Unusual Event
 Alert
 Site Area Emergency
 General Emergency
 Not Applicable

Subject: IMPROPER DISPOSAL OF PROMETHIUM-147 WEAPONS SIGHTS

On September 26, 1990, the Army notified Region III (Chicago) that luminous sights each containing about 100 microcuries of promethium-147 on disposable rocket launchers had been improperly disposed of at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The initial report indicated that 600-1000 sights were involved. The sights, mounted on the end of the rocket launchers, are required by procedure to be removed prior to the disposal of the launchers. However, the Army reported that the sights had not been removed from the devices following their use.

Promethium-147 is a beta emitter and is in the form of microspheres mixed with a phosphor and binder to provide the luminous characteristics. In the microsphere form, internal intake from airborne suspension of the radioactive material would be negligible. In addition, environmental migration of the material would be negligible.

A Region II (Atlanta) radiation specialist was dispatched to Fort Bragg on September 27, 1990, to investigate the circumstances of the disposal. Further information indicates that about 4,000 additional rocket launchers with the promethium-147 sights attached had been crushed and buried at the site during the past 9 months.

The Army has agreed to recover the sights and perform any necessary decontamination. Chem-Nuclear, the Army's contractor, will perform the decontamination work.

The Army will also investigate to determine whether the sights were improperly handed at 16 other sites where they are used.

The Air Force and the Marines are also authorized to use promethium-147 sights. Regions II and IV will review the use and disposal of sights by the Air Force and Marines. (The Air Force license is under Region IV jurisdiction, and the Navy/Marines license is under Region II.)

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Region III will issue a Confirmatory Action Letter to the Army, documenting its agreement to fully investigate the disposal practices and to decontaminate the disposal area at Fort Bragg.

The State of North Carolina has been notified. The information in this Preliminary Notification has been reviewed with licensee management.

Region III received initial notification of this matter on September 26, 1990. This information is current as of 10:00 a.m. (CDT) on September 28, 1990.

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