

DCS No: 99990001910115

Date: January 16, 1991

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE--PNO-I-91-7A

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 I staff on this date.

Facility:	Licensee Emergency Classification:
Nuclear Sources and Services	_____ Notification of Unusual Event
Houston, Texas	_____ Alert
Agreement State Licensee	_____ Site Area Emergency
	_____ General Emergency
	<u>X</u> _____ Not Applicable

Subject: UPDATE ON PNO-I-91-7, DAMAGE TO CONTAINER OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS ON BOARD A SHIP

NRC Region I has made arrangements with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Captain of the Port, New York, to board the MERKUR AFRICA when the ship enters U.S. territorial waters on January 17, 1991. Two NRC Region I health physicists, two representatives of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Radiation Safety Officer, Nuclear Sources and Services, Incorporated (NSSI), will survey and evaluate the radiological status of the ship; mitigate the consequences, as is possible; and advise the USCG relative to any radiological hazard that exists that could compromise public health and safety of the crew and the Port of New York. The NSSI's Radiation Safety Officer is equipped and prepared to perform source recovery, if necessary. Region I, with USCG and DOT approval, elected to board the vessel before it approached the port, since the overturned steel shipping box (which may still contain source containers) is in an area which would need to be accessed by the crew for docking and anchoring operations. The USCG is facilitating the boarding operation and arrangements with the ship's agent.

The ship's agent, Gulf Atlantic Marine Service, New York, contacted the MERKUR AFRICA on January 15, 1991, and advised the ship's master of the NRC's plan. The ship's master is in agreement and reported that 8 of the 14 source containers were recovered, intact, by the crew and are being stored in a separate area. The crew has not seen the remaining 6 containers or any unshielded sources since the storm on January 12, 1991, but believe that the devices, if on-board, may still be within the overturned steel shipping box. Since the ship has no radiation detection instruments, the crew has remained away from the box since the accident. NRC has advised the ship's agent that individuals should remain at least 15 feet away from any potentially unshielded sources, including the shipping box, to reduce the risk of inadvertent exposure to radiation. The agent confirmed that such precautions had already been implemented by the ship's master.

The New York State's Bureau of Radiation Protection, Albany; and the City of New York, Department of Public Health, have been informed of the NRC's plan, are in agreement, and have advised that they will provide assistance, when and if requested.

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