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## UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Governmental and Public Affairs

Region III

799 Roosevelt Road, Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137

NEWS ANNOUNCEMENT: 88-04

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### NRC STAFF SUSPENDS DISTRIBUTION OF SOME STATIC ELIMINATION DEVICES WHICH USE RADIOACTIVE POLONIUM

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has issued an order to Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company (3M) suspending the distribution of some static elimination devices which use radioactive polonium until the cause of leakage has been determined and corrective action has been approved by the NRC.

The order was issued after Ashland Chemical Company reported that radioactive contamination from the devices has been found at its facilities at Easton, PA, and Dallas, TX. Ashland reported that the leased devices from 3M are used as air cleaning units to remove dust particles from chemical packaging bottles. Ashland has reported that its radiation consultant at the Easton plant surveyed clothing worn by workers offsite and their automobiles and no contamination was found. Ashland facilities at Newark, CA, and Columbus, OH, were checked by the Company and no contamination was reported. Both Ashland and the 3M Company are cooperating with the NRC in responding to this incident.

Ashland also said that it will test employees at its Dallas and Easton facilities for internal contamination. According to the 3M Company, the radioactive polonium is bound in highly insoluble non-respirable particles. Polonium emits alpha radiation which will not penetrate the skin.

The NRC dispatched a five-member augmented inspection team to the Easton, PA, facility on January 22, 1988. Two NRC inspectors are at the 3M facility in Minnesota. The contamination at the Dallas facility is being checked by the Texas Bureau of Radiation Control, since Texas has regulatory authority over that facility.

In its order, issued this morning, the NRC staff directed the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, St. Paul, Minnesota, to:

1. Suspend distribution of some models in the series 900 polonium static elimination devices until the cause for leakage has been determined and corrective action is approved by NRC. This was the type of device used at the Easton and Dallas facilities.

2. Immediately inform present users of the devices of the incidents along with instructions to report to 3M if there is reason to suspect that similar problems might exist with devices in their possession.

3. Immediately start testing of other devices in order to develop a comprehensive test plan which will provide a high degree of assurance that any other leaking devices will be identified.

4. Provide a technical analysis of the causes of the problem and the way to correct it to the NRC's Region III Administrator at Glen Ellyn, IL.

January 25, 1988

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texas, pa. Sales of 3M air ionizer suspended under NRC order

ST. PAUL, Minn. (UPI) - 3M Co. said Monday it has suspended sales of three models of air ionizers under a Nuclear Regulatory Commission order.

The NRC temporarily suspended 3M's license to sell its 902, 906 and 908 model units until it is determined whether they can be used safely in industrial applications in accordance with 3M's specifications.

The NRC acted after a reported incident involving Ashland Chemicals' use of the 908 air ionizer in its Easton, Pa., and Dallas facilities.

Ashland said Friday that low-level alpha partical contamination had been detected at its Easton facility. Saturday, it found similar contamination at its Dallas facility.

3M's 908 air ionizer uses Polonium 210 nuclear material.

First introduced in 1965, 3M air ionizers have been used by tens of thousands of customers in a wide variety of industrial applications, 3M officials said. The devices are designed to protect personal health and safety even under adverse operating conditions, the company said.

No adverse health effects have been reported as a result of the devices, the company said.

The air ionizers dissipate electrostatic charges with alpha particles emitted from the Polonium 210. In the Models 902, 906 and 908, compressed air is passed across the nuclear device where it is ionized by the alpha particles. The alpha particles cannot travel more than two inches from the nuclear device and, unlike other types of radiation such as X-rays, beta, gamma and cosmic radition, cannot penetrate human skin, the company said.

The only health risk normally associated with alpha particles is if the raw nuclear material were to be inhaled or ingested, 3M said. The 3M ionizers, however, have the Polonium 210 encased in ceramic microspheres about the size of a grain of salt. They are too large to be inhaled and if eaten pass quickly through the body without any harmful side effects, the company said.

3M is contacting all customers who use the devise to determine if similar contamination has occurred.

The NRC order does not affect other 3M static control products that include nuclear elements, the company said.

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