

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION

November 8, 1978

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE--PNO-78-190

This preliminary notification constitutes EARLY notice of an event 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: Privately Owned Landfill  
Norton, Massachusetts

Subject: RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL IN PRIVATE DUMP

On October 16, 1978, a member of the public contacted Region I and reported that he had detected radiation on some industrial items in a dump area near Attleboro, Massachusetts.

On October 24, 1978, Region I inspectors accompanied by representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and local governments conducted a preliminary survey of the dump site. Industrial items reported by the individual to be radioactive were surveyed by the inspectors and found to have no radiation levels above background. A more detailed survey of other sections of the dump, however, identified three areas with localized radiation readings of 5 to 15 millirad/hour gross beta-gamma above background. The radioactivity appeared to be associated with the soil and to extend to at least a depth of four inches. Soil samples were obtained and analyzed to identify the radioactive material. Preliminary analysis by Region I and DOE's Radiological and Environmental Services Laboratory indicated that the radioactive material appeared to be natural and depleted processed uranium materials of unknown chemical composition. Analysis is continuing to identify the chemical composition of the material which may indicate its source.

The dump is located on privately owned land intersected by the Norton-Attleboro town line. All detected radioactivity was located in the section of the dump that is within the town of Norton. All dumping on this private land was stopped approximately six years ago as a result of local government action. The property is not fenced, but there is a steel cable restricting entrance via the roadway. The nearest normally occupied area is the land owners home located approximately 100 yards from the radioactive areas.

On October 31 through November 2, 1978, Region I inspectors accompanied by local and Commonwealth governmental representatives conducted an extensive surface survey of the dump site and identified areas of up to a total of 50,000 square feet on the Norton side of the dump with radiation readings of between 0.5 and 2 millirad/hour gross beta-gamma

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and isolated small areas of up to 20 millirad/hr gross beta-gamma above background. Soil samples were obtained to a depth of about 24 inches below the surface; ground water and mud samples were also obtained. These samples will also be analyzed to identify the radioactive material.

An investigation is being conducted to determine the source of this material.

A meeting will be held between NRC:IE-I, Town of Norton, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts officials on November 9, 1978, to inform them of findings to date, and a press release is planned at that time.

Media interest is expected because of public concern regarding radioactive material in the public domain. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts and local governments are being kept informed.

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