

Justice Department Doubtful of Killing Of Atomic Worker

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WASHINGTON, May 1—The Justice Department said today that the death of a young woman who had raised serious safety questions about an Oklahoma plutonium factory did not appear to be murder.

The department's announcement came five and a half months after the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union asked it to investigate the Nov. 13 car crash that took the life of Karen G. Silkwood, a 28-year-old technician who worked in a factory of the Kerr-McGhee Nuclear Corporation near Crescent, Okla.

While the Justice Department spokesman said the Federal Bureau of Investigation had found no evidence that Miss Silkwood had been murdered, he said that two aspects of the case were still under investigation.

The spokesman, Robert L. Stevenson, said the F.B.I. was still looking into allegations that Miss Silkwood's rights as a union member may have been violated.

Plutonium Possession

He said the second aspect was the possible illegal possession by some unnamed person or persons of plutonium, a carefully guarded substance that is considered highly dangerous both as a cause of cancer and as the raw material of atomic bombs.

A spokesman for the Senate Government Operations Committee said the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union last week submitted a confidential letter "detailing what it considered to be outstanding issues" of the F.B.I.'s investigation.

Both the union and the committee declined to make public the contents of the letter. But the committee spokesman said it had been forwarded to the General Accounting Office, which, at the request of Senator Lee Metcalf, Democrat of Montana, is investigating the quality of the inquiry by various Federal agencies looking into the Silkwood case.