

August 23, 1999

FOR: The Commissioners

FROM: William D. Travers /s/  
Executive Director for Operations

SUBJECT: REMOVAL OF THE PESSES/METALS COMPANY OF AMERICA SITE FROM THE SITE DECOMMISSIONING MANAGEMENT PLAN

## PURPOSE:

To inform the Commission that remediation has been completed at the Pesses/Metals Company of America (METCOA) site, in Pulaski, PA; and staff plans to release the site for unrestricted use, terminate the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) license, and remove the site from the Site Decommissioning Management Plan (SDMP) list.

## BACKGROUND:

In SECY-90-121, the original SDMP, and in subsequent revisions to the SDMP (SECY-91-096; 92-200; 93-179; 94-213; 95-209; 96-207; and 97-242), the staff identified approximately 50 sites that, because they met specific criteria (e.g., presence of large amounts of contaminated soil and potential contamination of groundwater or other environmental impacts), warranted NRC special oversight to ensure timely and safe remediation of residual radioactive material in excess of the current NRC criteria for release for unrestricted use. One of these sites is the Pesses/METCOA site.

In 1975, the Atomic Energy Commission issued Source Material License No. STB-1254 to the Pesses Company, a metal and alloy producer, which authorized the possession of 230 kilograms (kg) (500 pounds) of thorium as scrap containing not more than 2 percent thorium by weight for the purpose of alloy manufacture. The license was subsequently amended in June 1978 for possession of up to 925 kg (2000 pounds) of thorium scrap alloy for metallurgical treatment and/or reprocessing for distribution to authorized recipients. The original license authorized material to be used only at a location in Solon, OH. The June 1978 amendment changed the authorized location of use to the licensee's facilities located on Route 551 in Pulaski, Lawrence County, PA. The Pulaski site covers an area of approximately 9.1 hectares (22.5 acres), of which 2.4 hectares (6 acres) is enclosed by a chain link fence. A 3500 m<sup>2</sup> (37,500 ft<sup>2</sup>) foundry and warehouse building is located within the fenced area. There is no indication that foundry operations were conducted at any Pesses site except for the Pulaski location. In August 1980, the licensee submitted a request to renew the license that was due to expire on September 30, 1980. At that time, the licensee also requested an increase in the possession limit to 2000 kg of thorium. A June 1982 letter from NRC increased the possession limit to 2000 kg of thorium. The license was never renewed.

A June 1977 inspection at the Solon, OH, facility found no licensed material present; however, the licensee indicated that 1850 - 2300 kg (4000 - 5000 pounds) of slag waste (containing less than 0.02 percent thorium) was buried at the Pulaski, PA, facility. An NRC inspection in May 1979, at the Pulaski site, identified unspecified quantities of magnesium-thorium scrap in storage. On September 21, 1984, an inspector visited the site for a routine, unannounced inspection of the licensee's facilities and activities, and found the site unoccupied and apparently abandoned. The NRC subsequently found that in late 1982, The Pesses Company merged with its subsidiary, METCOA, Inc., and conducted licensed activities under this name without notification to NRC. In approximately mid-1983, the licensee entered bankruptcy proceedings, also without the knowledge of the NRC. In November 1983, an auction of equipment, tools, vehicles and office furniture from the Pulaski facility was conducted, also without the knowledge of the NRC. At that time, plant records not pertinent to the bankruptcy proceedings were destroyed.

As a follow-up to the September 1984 inspection, NRC staff conducted a special inspection in December 1984 at the Pulaski site to determine the radiological status of the facility. Measurements identified radiation levels ranging from 40 to 2000 microRoentgens/hour ( $\mu$ R/hr). Background radiation levels are approximately 10  $\mu$ R/hr in this area. Elevated measurements were found outside the fenced portion of the property, but not beyond the property boundary. More than three hundred 55-gallon drums, miscellaneous boxes, and piles of debris and slag were evident within the fenced area of the site. The drums and boxes were generally in very poor condition with many of the drums open or decayed and the contents on the ground. Radiation levels on contact with the drums ranged from 50 to 2000  $\mu$ R/hr. The inspector also found elevated radiation levels within the building, ranging from 40 to 100  $\mu$ R/hr, but only in a few, isolated areas. Although the building and the fence were found locked at the time of the inspection, the building was being used by a storage firm for storing boats and vehicles. Employees of the storage firm had unsupervised access to the building and property.

Staff from the Radiological Site Assessment Program of Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU), under contract to the NRC, conducted a more extensive radiological survey at the site in November 1985. Measurements included scans and direct measurements in exterior areas, direct measurements and smears in interior areas, and measurements of radionuclide concentrations in soil, water and sediment from exterior areas. The ORAU measurements identified radiation levels and concentrations of thorium in soil above NRC criteria for release for unrestricted use at numerous locations on the property. Thorium contamination was generally limited to surface and near surface (top 0.5 m) samples, primarily due to thoriated slag. Approximately 450 drums of contaminated soil/slag were identified. ORAU measurements confirmed that the building was generally free of contamination with the exception of a few isolated areas. The ORAU survey did not find any contamination in sediment or water nor did the survey identify any off-site migration of licensed material. ORAU estimated the volume of contaminated soil at 2500 - 3000 m<sup>3</sup>.

On January 22, 1986, NRC issued an Order that initiated the decommissioning process. Because Pesses also utilized other potentially hazardous materials at the facility, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania) were concerned about non-radiological, hazardous material contamination on the site. From May 1986 through September 1986, the EPA, along with NRC and Pennsylvania,

conducted an assessment to identify and quantify hazardous material contamination at the site. This 1986 assessment identified elevated levels of cadmium and/or nickel in soil in numerous areas of the site. EPA determined that these elevated concentrations presented an unacceptable risk to human health. After further analysis of the data from the assessment, an EPA contractor developed a site stabilization plan. From March through April 1987, EPA and EPA contractor staff performed further identification measurements and initiated stabilization actions. The actions included securing open drums, repackaging decayed drums, and covering bulk piles to reduce erosion. Also, at this time, EPA began to identify companies (potentially responsible parties (PRPs)) that had sent wastes to the Pesses/METCOA site.

From August 1990 to July 1993, EPA issued two Administrative Orders for Removal Response Activities to the PRP groups. Actions completed under the first of these two Orders included additional sampling and stabilization of wastes, disposal of non-radioactive debris, and an analysis of site remediation options. The second of the two Orders required disposal of the remaining drums on the site, excavation and disposal of contaminants in the soil, and removal of contaminated dust (principally cadmium) in the building. In 1996, due to a failure of the PRPs to respond to this second Order, EPA, with input from NRC, prepared an Engineering Evaluation and Cost Analysis (EECA) for the site. The EECA contained a summary of the data collected, a streamlined risk evaluation, an evaluation of response alternatives, and a recommended removal alternative. Radiological criteria for site decommissioning, which were included in the EECA, were identical to the criteria discussed in the (NRC) Action Plan to Ensure Timely Cleanup of Site Decommissioning Management Plan Sites (SDMP Action Plan) (57 FR 13389). The primary applicable decommissioning criteria for this site were a residual soil concentration limit for total thorium of 10 pCi/g and an exposure rate limit of 10 &#181R/hr above background for exterior land areas.

On June 19, 1997, a Consent Decree was approved with the METCOA Settling Parties (a group of the PRPs) that essentially required the METCOA Settling Parties to implement the recommended response actions identified in the EECA. Because the majority of the contamination on the site was non-radiological, hazardous material, EPA agreed to directly

monitor site cleanup activities, with input as needed from NRC. In August 1997, a contractor for the METCOA Settling Parties submitted a Response Action Plan for the site that described the final cleanup and disposal actions for the site. The contractor incorporated EPA and NRC comments and EPA approved the plan in September 1997. Beginning in October 1997, contractors commenced removal of contaminated soil, slag, and debris. The contractors also remediated contamination inside the building. Remediation was essentially completed by mid-summer 1998.

Because much of the waste from the site was a mixed waste, i.e. containing both radiological and Resource Conservation Recovery Act (RCRA) hazardous waste components, the contractors used a variety of locations for disposal. A total of 126 m<sup>3</sup> (146 yd<sup>3</sup>) of thoriated slag and soil, with total thorium concentrations exceeding 109 pCi/g, were disposed at the Envirocare facility in Utah. Consistent with Commission direction contained in a Staff Requirements Memorandum dated December 17, 1998, to COMSECY-98-022, approximately 200 m<sup>3</sup> (263 yd<sup>3</sup>) of mixed wastes containing thoriated slag and soil, with total thorium concentrations less than 0.05% by weight (109 pCi/g), were sent to a commercial facility in Texas (Waste Control Specialists). Approximately 2000 m<sup>3</sup> (2600 yd<sup>3</sup>) of wastes containing elevated levels of cadmium and nickel, with total thorium concentrations less than 10 pCi/g, the applicable NRC guidance for release for unrestricted use, were disposed at a hazardous waste landfill in Pennsylvania. Building debris, contaminated with hazardous material, was disposed of at a hazardous waste landfill in New York state.

From January 1998 through May 1999, staff from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the NRC conducted confirmatory measurements inside the building and in exterior land areas of the site. Confirmatory measurements included scanning and direct measurements, smears of surfaces, and the analysis of surface and near-surface soil samples. Final confirmatory results from NRC and DEP indicate that the facility meets the NRC criteria for release for unrestricted use listed in the SDMP Action Plan. Radiological surveys by NRC staff previously confirmed that the Solon, OH, facility met NRC release criteria.

Based on the average soil concentrations of residual thorium (0.19 pCi/g Th-228 and 0.192 pCi/g Th-232) determined from the final surveys, the dose to a hypothetical resident farmer was computed. The peak dose over a 1000-year period would be 0.024 mSv/yr (2.4 mrem/yr) for the site.

#### DISCUSSION:

Based on the staff's review of the contractor's final surveys and the results of NRC and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's confirmatory surveys, the staff concludes that the Pesses/METCOA site meets the conditions for release for unrestricted use. NRC staff has coordinated its regulatory activities with EPA, Region III, and Pennsylvania DEP throughout the decommissioning process. NRC staff intends to inform EPA, Pennsylvania, the Lawrence County Commissioners, and the METCOA Settling Parties of NRC's intent to release the Pesses/METCOA site for unrestricted use and remove it from the SDMP list. Draft letters are attached (see Attachments 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). Additionally, a draft press release is also attached ([Attachment 6](#)). The Office of the General Counsel has reviewed this paper and has no legal objection.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

Although we consider this action to be within the delegated authority of the Director of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards, action will not be taken until the SRM is received. Staff requests action within 10 days.

William D. Travers  
Executive Director for Operations

CONTACT: M. Roberts, RI  
610-337-5094  
L. Camper, DWM/NMSS  
301-415-7234

- Attachments:
1. Draft letter to U.S. EPA
  2. Draft letter to U.S. EPA, Region III
  3. Draft letter to Pennsylvania DEP
  4. Draft letter to Lawrence County Commissioners
  5. Draft letter to METCOA Settling Parties
  6. Draft press release

---

ATTACHMENT 1

Mr. Stephen D. Luftig, Director  
Office of Emergency and Remediation Response  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
401 M Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Mr. Luftig:

This letter is to inform the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA **EXIT** NEI ) that the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is preparing to authorize release of the building and land at the former Pesses/Metals Company of America (METCOA) site in Pulaski, Pennsylvania, for unrestricted use.

The staff is providing this information to EPA in accordance with NRC policy contained in the "Action Plan to Ensure Timely Cleanup of Site Decommissioning Management Plan Sites" (57 FR 13389), which states that NRC will inform EPA about specific decommissioning actions at Site Decommissioning Management Plan (SDMP) sites.

In 1975, the Atomic Energy Commission issued a license to The Pesses Company of Solon, Ohio, a metals and alloys producer, which used thorium scrap alloy (up to 2 percent thorium) as well as other metals in its manufacturing processes. Foundry work with licensed material was actually conducted at the company's facility in Pulaski, Pennsylvania. In September 1984, a routine NRC inspection found the Pulaski, Pennsylvania, facility unoccupied and apparently abandoned. The NRC subsequently found that The Pesses Company merged with its subsidiary, METCOA, Inc., and conducted licensed activities under this name. In approximately mid-1983, the licensee entered bankruptcy proceedings without the knowledge of the NRC.

From 1986 through 1990, NRC, EPA, and your contractors performed radiological and non-radiological assessments of the contaminants on the site and conducted stabilization actions to prevent erosion of materials. In 1997, a group of potentially responsible parties (the METCOA Settling Parties) signed a consent order to remediate the site. Because of the presence of significant quantities of non-radiological, hazardous wastes, EPA Region III staff took the lead responsibility for directly monitoring the cleanup actions.

Contractors for the METCOA Settling Parties remediated thorium and non-radiological hazardous material contamination on the site from October 1997 through mid-1998. Final surveys by the contractor and confirmatory measurements were made by the NRC and Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) staffs in 1998 and early 1999. A total of 126 cubic meters (4500 cubic feet) of radioactive waste soil and slag were shipped to the Envirocare low-level waste site in Utah for disposal. Other wastes were disposed of at facilities in New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas, depending on the characteristics of the waste. Based on the METCOA Settling Parties' contractor's final surveys and the results of NRC and Pennsylvania DEP confirmatory surveys, NRC concludes that the site has been properly remediated and now meets NRC criteria for unrestricted use. NRC previously determined that the Solon, OH, facility met NRC release criteria.

The project manager for the Pesses/METCOA site is Mark C. Roberts. If you have any questions on this matter, please contact him, at (610) 337-5094.

Sincerely,  
Ronald R. Bellamy, Chief  
Decommissioning and Laboratory Branch  
Division of Nuclear Materials Safety

Docket No. 040-08406  
License No. STB-1254

cc: D. Matlock, EPA Region II Field Office  
R. Maiers, Pennsylvania DEP  
H. Wein, METCOA Settling Parties

---

ATTACHMENT 2

Mr. Dennis Matlock  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Region III Field Office  
10 Chapline Street

Suite 401  
Wheeling, WV 26003-2995

Dear Mr. Matlock:

This letter is to inform the Environmental Protection Agency, Region III that the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is preparing to authorize release of land and the building at the former Pesses/Metals Company of America (METCOA) site in Pulaski, Pennsylvania for unrestricted use.

In 1975, the Atomic Energy Commission issued a license to The Pesses Company of Solon, Ohio, a metals and alloys producer, which used thorium scrap alloy (up to 2% thorium) as well as other metals in its manufacturing processes. Foundry work with licensed material was actually conducted at the company's facility in Pulaski, Pennsylvania. In September, 1984, a routine NRC inspection found the Pulaski, Pennsylvania facility unoccupied and apparently abandoned. The NRC subsequently found that The Pesses Company merged with its subsidiary, METCOA, Inc., and conducted licensed activities under this name. In approximately mid-1983, the licensee entered bankruptcy proceedings without the knowledge of the NRC.

From 1986 through 1990, NRC, EPA, and your contractors performed radiological and non-radiological assessments of the contaminants on the site and conducted stabilization actions to prevent erosion of materials. In 1997, a group of potentially responsible parties (the METCOA Settling Parties) signed a consent order to remediate the site. Because of the presence of significant quantities of non-radiological, hazardous wastes, EPA Region III staff took the lead responsibility for directly monitoring the cleanup actions.

Contractors for the METCOA Settling Parties remediated thorium and non-radiological hazardous material contamination on the site from October 1997 through mid-1998. Final surveys by the contractor and confirmatory measurements were made by the NRC and Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) staffs in 1998 and early 1999. A total of 126 cubic meters (4500 cubic feet) of radioactive waste soil and slag were shipped to the Envirocare low-level waste site in Utah for disposal. Other wastes were disposed of at facilities in New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas, depending on the characteristics of the waste. Based on the METCOA Settling Parties' contractor's final surveys and the results of NRC and Pennsylvania DEP confirmatory surveys, NRC concludes that the site has been properly remediated and now meets NRC criteria for unrestricted use. NRC previously determined that the Solon, Ohio facility met NRC release criteria.

Over the course of the Pesses/METCOA remediation project, we have very much appreciated the support and coordination provided by you and Mr. Jeff Dodd in your roles as On-Scene Coordinators. Without your support this project could not have been successfully completed.

If you have any questions, please contact the NRC project manager, Mr. Mark C. Roberts at (610) 337-5094.

Sincerely,  
Ronald R. Bellamy, Chief  
Decommissioning and Laboratory Branch  
Division of Nuclear Materials Safety

Docket No. 040-08406  
License No. STB-1254

---

ATTACHMENT 3

Mr. Robert Maiers  
Bureau of Radiation Protection  
Department of Environmental Protection  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
P.O. Box 8469  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8469

Dear Mr. Maiers:

This letter is to inform the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Radiation Protection, that the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is preparing to authorize release of land and the building at the former Pesses/Metals Company of America (METCOA) site in Pulaski, Pennsylvania, for unrestricted use.

In 1975, the Atomic Energy Commission issued a license to The Pesses Company of Solon, Ohio, a metals and alloys producer, which used thorium scrap alloy (up to 2% thorium) as well as other metals in its manufacturing processes. Foundry work with licensed material was actually conducted at the company's facility in Pulaski, Pennsylvania. In September, 1984, a routine NRC inspection found the Pulaski, Pennsylvania facility unoccupied and apparently abandoned. The NRC subsequently found that The Pesses Company merged with its subsidiary, METCOA, Inc., and conducted licensed activities under this name. In approximately mid-1983, the licensee entered bankruptcy proceedings without the knowledge of the NRC.

From 1986 through 1990, NRC, EPA, and their contractors performed radiological and non-radiological assessments of the contaminants on the site and conducted stabilization actions to prevent erosion of materials. In 1997, a group of potentially responsible parties (the METCOA Settling Parties) signed a consent order to remediate the site. Because of the presence of significant quantities of non-radiological, hazardous wastes, EPA Region III staff took the

lead responsibility for directly monitoring the cleanup actions.

Contractors for the METCOA Settling Parties remediated thorium and non-radiological hazardous material contamination on the site from October 1997 through mid-1998. Final surveys by the contractor and confirmatory measurements were made by the NRC and Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) staffs in 1998 and early 1999. A total of 126 cubic meters (4500 cubic feet) of radioactive waste soil and slag were shipped to the Envirocare low-level waste site in Utah for disposal. Other wastes were disposed of at facilities in New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas, depending on the characteristics of the waste. Based on the METCOA Settling Parties' contractor's final surveys and the results of NRC and Pennsylvania DEP confirmatory surveys, NRC concludes that the site has been properly remediated and now meets NRC criteria for unrestricted use.

Over the course of the Pesses/METCOA remediation project, we have very much appreciated the support and coordination provided by Mr. James Yusko, Mr. Roy Woods, and radiation protection staff from the DEP's Southwest Regional Office. Without this support this project could not have been successfully completed.

If you have any questions, please contact the NRC project manager, Mr. Mark C. Roberts, at (610) 337-5094.

Sincerely,  
Ronald R. Bellamy, Chief  
Decommissioning and Laboratory Branch  
Division of Nuclear Materials Safety

Docket No. 040-08406

License No. STB-1254

cc: J. Yusko, Pennsylvania DEP  
R. Woods, Pennsylvania DEP  
H. Wein, METCOA Settling Parties

---

ATTACHMENT 4

Mr. Thomas J. Fee  
Chairman, Lawrence County Commissioners  
Government Center  
430 Court Street  
New Castle, PA 16101

Dear Mr. Fee:

This letter is to inform the Lawrence County Commissioners that the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is preparing to authorize release of land and the building at the former Pesses/Metals Company of America (METCOA) site in Pulaski, Pennsylvania for unrestricted use.

In 1975, the Atomic Energy Commission issued a license to The Pesses Company of Solon, Ohio, a metals and alloys producer, which used thorium scrap alloy (up to 2% thorium) as well as other metals in its manufacturing processes. Foundry work with licensed material was actually conducted at the company's facility in Pulaski, Pennsylvania. In September, 1984, a routine NRC inspection found the Pulaski, Pennsylvania facility unoccupied and apparently abandoned. The NRC subsequently found that The Pesses Company merged with its subsidiary, METCOA, Inc., and conducted licensed activities under this name. In approximately mid-1983, the licensee entered bankruptcy proceedings without the knowledge of the NRC.

From 1986 through 1990, NRC, EPA, and their contractors performed radiological and non-radiological assessments of the contaminants on the site and conducted stabilization actions to prevent erosion of materials. In 1997, a group of potentially responsible parties (the METCOA Settling Parties) signed a consent order to remediate the site. Because of the presence of significant quantities of non-radiological, hazardous wastes, EPA Region III staff took the lead responsibility for directly monitoring the cleanup actions.

Contractors for the METCOA Settling Parties remediated thorium and non-radiological hazardous material contamination on the site from October 1997 through mid-1998. Final surveys by the contractor and confirmatory measurements were made by the NRC and Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) staffs in 1998 and early 1999. A total of 126 cubic meters (4500 cubic feet) of radioactive waste soil and slag were shipped to the Envirocare low-level waste site in Utah for disposal. Other wastes were disposed of at facilities in New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas, depending on the characteristics of the waste. Based on the METCOA Settling Parties' contractor's final surveys and the results of NRC and Pennsylvania DEP confirmatory surveys, NRC concludes that the site has been properly remediated and now meets NRC criteria for unrestricted use.

If you have any questions, please contact the NRC project manager, Mr. Mark C. Roberts, at (610) 337-5094.

Sincerely,  
Ronald R. Bellamy, Chief  
Decommissioning and Laboratory Branch  
Division of Nuclear Materials Safety

Docket No. 040-08406

License No. STB-1254

cc: D. Abramson, Pulaski Township

ATTACHMENT 5

METCOA Settling Parties  
c/o Mr. Howard Wein, Esq.  
Klett, Lieber, Rooney & Schorling  
One Oxford Centre  
40<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Dear Mr. Wein:

This letter is to inform the METCOA Settling Parties that the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is preparing to authorize release of land and the building at the former Pesses/ Metals Company of America (METCOA) site in Pulaski, Pennsylvania for unrestricted use.

From 1997 to 1999, contractors representing the METCOA Settling Parties performed remediation and surveys at the former Pesses/METCOA site in Pulaski, Pennsylvania. The site was remediated in accordance with criteria specified in the "Action Plan for Ensuring Timely Cleanup of Site Decommissioning Management Plan Sites" (Action Plan) (57 FR 13889). U.S. NRC inspectors and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) staff observed the contractors' remediation and final radiological survey activities. NRC and Pennsylvania DEP inspectors also performed independent confirmatory surveys. Based on the contractor's final surveys and the results of NRC and Pennsylvania DEP confirmatory surveys, NRC concludes that the site has been properly remediated and now meets NRC criteria for unrestricted use as provided in the Action Plan. NRC will also terminate the license.

As provided in the Action Plan, this is the final action regarding the former Pesses/METCOA site. NRC will not require any additional decommissioning, in response to future NRC criteria or standards, unless additional contamination or noncompliance with remediation commitments is found, indicating a significant threat to public health and safety.

Over the course of the Pesses/METCOA remediation project, we have very much appreciated the support and coordination provided by your contractors' staffs. Without this support this project could not have been successfully completed.

If you have any questions about this matter, please contact the NRC project manager, Mr. Mark Roberts, at (610) 337-5094.

Sincerely,  
Ronald R. Bellamy, Chief  
Decommissioning and Laboratory Branch  
Division of Nuclear Materials Safety

Docket No. 040-08406

License No. STB-1254

cc: K. Miller, Civil & Environmental  
Consultants, Inc.  
B. Koh, B. Koh & Associates, Inc.

ATTACHMENT 6

August 20, 1999 (2:35 P.M.)

OPA  
D R A F T

(Source: )

NRC RELEASES PREVIOUSLY CONTAMINATED SITE IN PENNSYLVANIA  
FOR UNRESTRICTED USE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has released a site formerly owned by METCOA (Metals Company of America), Inc., (previously, The Pesses Company), in Pulaski, Pennsylvania, for unrestricted use following cleanup of radioactive contamination to safe levels.

A license was issued in 1975 to The Pesses Company, a metals and alloys producer, which used thorium scrap alloy, as well as other metals, in its manufacturing processes. (Thorium is a radioactive material licensed by the NRC for commercial uses.) Foundry work with the licensed material was conducted at the company's site in Pulaski, which covers an area of about 22 acres, of which 6 acres is enclosed by a chain link fence.

Pesses used other potentially hazardous materials at the facility, in addition to thorium. The majority of contamination on the site was non-radiological hazardous material.

In September 1984, a routine NRC inspection found the Pulaski facility unoccupied and apparently abandoned. The NRC subsequently found that The Pesses Company merged with METCOA without notification to the NRC. Further, in about mid-1983, the licensee entered bankruptcy proceedings also without notifying the NRC.

In a follow-up to the 1984 inspection, the NRC detected radiation levels considerably above normal background levels on 55-gallon drums, within a building, and on other areas of the site, including some elevated levels outside the fence, but not beyond the property boundary. More than 300 drums, miscellaneous boxes and piles of debris and slag were present within the fenced area.

From 1986 through 1990, the NRC, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and their contractors conducted further assessments on site. An NRC contractor identified radiation levels and concentrations of thorium in soil above NRC limits for unrestricted use at numerous locations on the property. The two agencies and their contractors also conducted stabilization actions during this period, including closing drums that had been left open or overpacking them with larger drums and covering piles of material to prevent erosion.

In 1997, a group of organizations that had sent wastes to the site signed a consent order with the EPA agreeing to remediate the site. Under this agreement contractors worked to clean up the contamination on the site from October 1997 through mid-1998.

Radioactive waste soil and slag were shipped to the Envirocare low-level radioactive waste site in Utah for disposal. Other, non-radiological wastes were disposed of at authorized facilities in New York, Pennsylvania and Texas.

Final surveys by the contractor were followed up with confirmatory measurements by the NRC and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection in 1998 and early 1999. Based on the results of these surveys and measurements, the NRC has concluded that the site has been properly cleaned up and meets its criteria for unrestricted use.

The NRC has therefore terminated the license and removed the Pesses site from the agency's Site Decommissioning Management Plan, which identifies about 34 sites throughout the United States that are contaminated with radioactive materials and warrant special attention to ensure proper cleanup.