



Missing and Stolen U. S. Radioactive Materials

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U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Operations Center

Event Notification Report For
06/26/2002 - 06/27/2002

General Information or Other [Event Number: 39014 |
REP ORG: MA RADIATION CONTROL PROGRAM [NOTIFICATION DATE:
06/24/2002]
LICENSEE: AEA TECHNOLOGY QSA INC. [NOTIFICATION TIME: 12:42[EDT]]
[CITY: BURLINGTON REGION: 1 [EVENT DATE: 06/24/2002]
[COUNTY: STATE: MA [EVENT TIME: 10:35[EDT]]
[LICENSE#: 12-8361 AGREEMENT: Y [LAST UPDATE DATE: 06/24/2002]

EVENT TEXT

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AEA Technology QSA, Inc. (AEA) called to notify the State of the report to |
their office of the receipt of a package of very low activity Pu-242/American-243 |
[12 Bq each] by Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory. AEA was notified by Knolls |
Atomic that the package, received by them on 12/6/01 or 12/7/01, was opened |
on or around 5/20/02, at which time the inner container appeared to have |
been opened, and all contents were absent. |
|
The State Agency was informed by the licensee they received the shipment |
from England on 12/5/01, checked the outer cardboard container for damage, |
and resent the shipment to their customer, Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory in |
New York. The package was received 12/6/01 or 12/7/01. At Knolls, the |
radiation safety staff received the shipment and confirmed the outer package |
was undamaged and delivered it to the end user in the Chemistry Department. |
The user opened the package on or around 5/20/02. Knolls Atomic informed |
AEA they believe the seal on the inner plastic container was intact, but |
that the final container, a flame-sealed glass container, appeared to have |
been opened and the contents removed, in addition, AEA was informed that |
the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was notified |
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Earthfiles, news category.

June 24, 2002 Event Notification Report by U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission about Plutonium-242 and Americium-243 missing from a December 2001 shipment, not opened until May 20, 2002 and not reported by the NRC until June 24, 2002. To date, no one knows what has happened to the radioactive material supposedly encased in a flame-sealed glass container inside the shipping box and protective plastic container. The FBI is investigating.

June 29, 2002 Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania - This week, the U. S. Nuclear Regulatory commission issued an Event Notification Report about radioactive Americium-243 and Plutonium-242 that are missing from a shipment between AEA Technology of Burlington, Massachusetts and Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory in New York.

According to NRC and Department of Energy records, in the United States every year on average, about three hundred cases of missing radioactive materials are reported. Half of those are eventually recovered. But what about the other 150 cases of missing radioactive materials? Or the 9,000 missing nuclear items that the Department of Energy says it is trying to track?

Radioactive materials such as cesium in medical equipment, cobalt used in the food irradiation industry, americium used in oil industry research and spent rods from nuclear power plants can all be used by terrorists to make dirty bombs. All a terrorist has to do is have enough technical know-how to wrap stolen radioactive material around sticks of dynamite and blow it up. The radioactive contamination floating on the dust and wind could make dozens of city blocks in any city unlivable for decades to come. Imagine millions of New Yorkers trying to get off the island if one or more dirty bombs went off? The economic and psychological toll, beyond physical destruction from the explosion or explosions, would be huge possibly requiring evacuation from most of the city.

What is particularly disturbing about this most recent Nuclear Regulatory alert about the missing plutonium and americium is the fact that the shipment was received on December 7, 2001. But the package was not even opened until May 20, 2002, five months later. That's when it was discovered the flame-sealed glass container designed to hold the radioactive substances inside the shipping box and protective plastic container was *empty*. The FBI was called in to investigate. But the Nuclear Regulatory Commission waited until June 24 to issue the alert.

I talked about the dangers of missing and stolen radioactive materials in the United States with Scott Portzline. Scott helped the volunteer civilian Three Mile Island Alert group in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania monitor radiation and security near that nuclear power plant. He has testified before the U. S. Senate, the U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards and other governmental bodies in an effort to close security gaps that he has found. His research has been cited by the U. S. Department of Energy and various military branches. Scott worries that dirty bombs and attacks on nuclear power plants are high on the Al Qaeda terrorist To Do list in the United States.



Scott Portzline, Former Security Chairman,
Three Mile Island Alert, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.
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Interview:

Scott Portzline, Former Security Chairman for Three Mile Island Alert (TMIA), Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: "The AEA Technology and Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory case shows there is *still* not a proper control. If you receive something that can be deadly like this, then you should be required to confirm that the contents are inside that package within a few hours, maybe as much as 24 hours.

At least. And where did the plutonium and americium go if they weren't in the package?

Nobody knows! The FBI was notified. The initial report suggested the package was shipped to England.

There is a precursor to this event that involved a large amount of Iridium-192 and it was shipped from the AEA Technologies near Boston. It was supposed to go to Mexico. But what happened was that they lost track of it and it wound up at an airport outside London, England. So, this huge source of Iridium-192 866 curies was missing for ten days. It set off a frantic 5 day search along the road between the company and the Boston Airport for any signs of radiation.

This occurred on what date?

April 1999. And it was being shipped by Fed Ex. Plutonium and things like this can be shipped through Federal Express. Radium-192 can be very deadly.

There is a 1999 precedent of radioactive material going astray in a Fed Ex shipment. Now in 2002, there is missing americium and plutonium from a package shipped in December and not opened until May. No one knows where the material is and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is only now making the alert announcement.

Yes. And that's a good point. That was a huge loss in 1999. Yet, nobody was

saying anything in the news about, 'Look out for this package. It could kill a lot of people in the Boston or New York area.'

It was my telephone call to the *Boston Globe* that first broke this story because of the dangers involved. I've experienced this in the past. I monitor the daily event reports from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Back in 1996, I started noticed a high volume in my opinion of lost or stolen nuclear materials in the United States. So I made a few phone calls to other researchers and anti-nuclear activists and found that nobody was really monitoring this side of the nuclear industry. I started attending some of the meetings that were happening at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Missing radioactive materials are happening every other day that I can document. But I can extrapolate that it's actually occurring *every* day - radioactive substances in the United States are lost, stolen or found.

One Ton of Beryllium and Cobalt Smuggled

There was an incident in Texas on December 19, 1996 where Mexican custom agents found a truck crossing from Texas into Mexico. It had a false bottom. There was some sort of metal material. They weren't sure what it was, so they asked for help from the nearby Ft. Bliss Army base. They wanted to know if the material was radioactive.

Well, it turned out to be a *ton* of cobalt and beryllium.

A ton?

A ton of cobalt and beryllium, highly radioactive, highly dangerous. Beryllium is used to produce neutrons in a chain reaction in a nuclear weapon. I'm speculating that this came from one of the nuclear laboratories out in the West like Los Alamos or Colorado.

Why was all this radioactive material being smuggled in the false bottom of a truck?

That's a good question. I called the people who were mentioned in the initial report. I called the FBI. I called the police. I called one of the soldiers at Ft. Bliss that was mentioned. Everybody said they didn't know what I was talking about. That told me that national security had just been breached.

Is your implication that they had knowledge and would not admit it?

Sure. There were no further reports. I think the initial report that came out shouldn't have come out, that it got by the classifiers at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. This was an event that indicated somebody had beryllium used for nuclear weapons and cobalt and was obviously smuggling it. It was hidden in the false bottom of this truck. The government did not want to talk about it.

Do you have any idea what happened to that ton of radioactive material?

No, but I'm hopeful that it was ceased by the agents and has been taken care of properly.

Mock Security Drills At Nuclear Weapons Laboratories

We also have security problems at some of the nuclear weapons laboratories, which I just indicated. There were security drills at the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory, controlled by the Department of Energy, where mock intruders gained control of enough uranium to cause a nuclear detonation. They weren't able to get off-site with it, but if they had been suicidal terrorists, they would have been able to assemble it into a crude nuclear device and destroy it then.

Another drill at Rocky Flats, Colorado nuclear facility, mock intruders stole

enough plutonium for several nuclear bombs. What they did, to test the security guards there, one intruder went into the facility with a lacrosse stick and threw plutonium over the fence to someone else with another lacrosse stick. Then they went outside and a minute or two later, they saw all the guards high fiving each other who believed they had successfully repelled the attackers since they didn't see anybody. But their alarms went off and they figured the intruders had retreated. So, here the guards were congratulating themselves, yet enough plutonium had just been stolen to produce several nuclear bombs from their facility.

You have been trying to monitor missing radioactive materials since 1996. Now we have gone through September 11th and all Americans are wondering what is going to happen July 4. What is your personal greatest concern about an event that could happen?

My greatest concern is selfish. I live about 13 miles from Three Mile Island. I am concerned there is going to be a commando attack or an airplane attack on Three Mile Island. Three Mile Island keeps being mentioned by the terrorists. They had a training camp nearby in 1993 where they did a nighttime mock assault on an electrical substation as if they were practicing going into a nuclear plant. They threatened to attack nuclear plants.

In fact, just a few days after the World Trade Center was bombed in 1993, the same terrorists that had the training camp near Three Mile Island threatened to attack nuclear plants with 150 suicide soldiers. So, my concern or my greatest fear is an attack on a nuclear plant.

What Dirty Bombs Could Do
See Earthfiles 05/25/02

But what would be easier to do would be the dirty bombs. I would picture a dirty bomb event happening in some of the larger cities where it can do the greatest terror or greatest economic damage. In my opinion, the greatest problem is not the terror, but the economic damage that will occur.

The radioactivity would contaminate buildings, sidewalks, metals, just about everything?

That is a possibility with a larger bomb and a lot of dust and a lot of radioactive particulate matter.

What would happen in a city like New York if two or three dirty bombs were set off?

They would be totally devastating. The first thing you would see happen would be people trying to evacuate. There would probably be some people harmed in just that hurried evacuation. No order would have to be given. People would just do it. There would be public urgings of people not to try to evacuate from certain areas because they would just be adding to the problem.

Secondly, you would see this tremendous need for health screening. People would inundate hospitals wanting to be measured for radioactivity. Some of them would already be having symptoms that were real. Some would have symptoms that are imagined. The economic burden of just the health effects and evacuation would be tremendous.

Then you have to have the responders who are measuring the radiation, trying to determine what the exclusion zone should be, the evacuation zone. Finally, you would have disruption of business, possibly the loss of buildings for blocks and blocks, dozens of blocks, even hundreds of blocks.

Even a hundred square miles if there were three large dirty bombs exploded.

The economic impact could easily reach the multi-trillions of dollars.

To clean up a city, there would first have to be a mass exodus of a lot of people out of an island like Manhattan for some indeterminate period of time.

That's right. There would be reluctance to live there, to work there. In other words, you would almost have to rebuild an entire Manhattan somewhere else. Move all those businesses, the corporate offices. They wouldn't want to have their workers go in to an area where people aren't comfortable.



Three Mile Island nuclear power plant near Pennsylvania's state capitol, Harrisburg, and the Harrisburg International Airport.

Security At Three Mile Island Prior to Fourth of July 2002

The National Guard is there and security seems tighter, but the front main gate is still open most of the time. Just last week I found out that the FBI has asked the guards at nuclear power plants to check the identification and photograph any people who are filming or videotaping at a nuclear plant or any surveillance activity that they are suspicious about. If anyone crosses a boundary line at a nuclear plant, they are to get their identification. I learned this was going on because some of the guards have been reporting to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission or to the FBI that they believe they have seen some of the terrorists whose photographs are on the FBI watch list.

To think that today in June 2002 as we go into the Fourth of July that some of those characters from the FBI's most wanted terrorist list might be hanging around nuclear power plants is unsettling.

It sure is. I'm concerned that they are doing their homework. Al Qaeda operatives have had plant designs and schematics. They were found in caves in Afghanistan.

Also, last week, a Pennsylvania legislator sponsored legislation to urge the governor of PA to give the National Guardsmen at the nuclear power plants loaded weapons. They have to suspend the normal rules in order to get that on the table. For some reason they had to resort to political highjinks to get a common sense bill before the legislation which only urges the governor to give the national guardsmen loaded weapons.

In the light of 9/11, why would there be any question or resistance to having guards at nuclear power plants have loaded weapons?

I think there is some concern of having a misfire, that somebody could be injured by a mistake made at a nuclear plant. For instance, just last week at the Fitzpatrick Nuclear Plant in New York, there was an accident with a National Guardsman in a humvee where they forgot to set the parking brake on a shift change and it rolled into Lake Ontario.

Who are the people in security at nuclear power plants these days?

The National Guard are just your average neighbor, not necessarily trained to protect a nuclear power plant. There are going to be mistakes that are going to be made, but there is also concern with the ammunition of regular company guards at these plants who have accidentally fired their weapons. One man accidentally shot his foot. Another shot into his vehicle.

Mock Nuclear Security Exercises at U. S. Air Force Bases

Dr. John Weinstein, he is chief command and control of the nuclear support staff in Washington, D. C. for the U. S. Army. He gave a lecture at the U. S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania on Jan. 19, 1998 which I attended. He told us that in 75% of these security tests at Air Force Bases, the mock intruders were able to get access to nuclear weapons. And in 33% of the tests, they actually made off with the weapons.

While we keep pointing to the Soviet Union as a source of nuclear materials to be used as dirty bombs, or even the ultimate nuclear weapon, right here in the United States we have enormous gaps in our security.

Clear evidence that radioactive material is lost or stolen or handled sloppily all of the time.

Yes.

It is almost like we all need to be walking around with a Geiger counter now because you don't know exactly where all the invisible radiation could be.

I have two portable Geiger counters and a third that I got at a Dept. of Defense. It's a Civil Defense unit I need to get calibrated.

Another thing that happened this week was at the Point Beach Nuclear Plant in Wisconsin. One of the security guards tested positive for drugs and so they had to let him go. That meant the plant went below the minimum number of guards required. That also tells me that even at this time of terrorist threats, nuclear power plants are still using the absolute minimum number of guards that the NRC says they should have.

This happened right before the Fourth of July after the FBI warned about Three Mile Island more than a month ago.

That's right."

Website:

<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/event-status/event/>

<http://www.fas.org>

<http://www.tmia.com>

<http://www.nci.org>

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/>

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