

October 17, 1996

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE PNO-IV-96-057

This preliminary notification constitutes EARLY notice of events of POSSIBLE safety or public interest significance. The information is as initially received without verification or evaluation, and is basically all that is known by Region IV staff in Arlington, Texas on this date.

Facility**Licensee Emergency Classification**

General Atomics

Notification of Unusual Event

General Atomics

Alert

san Diego, California

Site Area Emergency

Dockets: 07000734 License No: SNM-696

General Emergency

X Not Applicable

Subject: SMALL FIRE IN EMPTY HOT CELL

At 2:12 p.m. (PDT) on October 16, 1996, the licensee notified the NRC Region IV Office that at approximately 4:45 p.m. on October 15, 1996, they discovered that a plastic paint tray had burned inside of the licensee's low-level hot cell. The licensee had been in the process of applying a strippable paint to remove contamination. The licensee stated that the fire did not involve radioactive materials and there was no release of radioactive material or damage to the facility. However, the differential pressure of the booster fan HEPA filter system exceeded the licensee's action level for filter replacement. The main HEPA filtering system was not affected and was capable of performing its safety function. Had the booster fan HEPAs completely plugged, all air flow would automatically divert to the main HEPA filtering system. The licensee is in the process of replacing the booster fan HEPAs. The licensee's hot cell facility is licensed by the State of California for byproduct material and the NRC for special nuclear material (SNM), and is currently undergoing decommissioning. All SNM has been removed from the facility and the remaining residual contaminants (approximately 50,000 dpm/100 cm²) are byproduct materials. The licensee suspects that the plastic paint tray may have ignited from arc cutting operations outside the low-level hot cell door on October 11, 1996. Since the low-level cell is negative in pressure to the area of cutting, a spark may have been pulled into the cell and ignited the paint tray that was on the floor near the partially open cell door. The fire was not detected until the lights were turned on inside the cell on October 15, 1996.

The licensee is investigating the event to further evaluate the cause. This information is current as of 9:00 a.m. PDT on October 17, 1996.

Region IV discussed this event with the licensee via telephone and will review the matter further during an inspection scheduled for early December 1996.

The licensee has informed the State of California.

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