

November 15, 1996

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE PNO-III-96-069

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 III staff (Lisle, Illinois) on this date.

Facility
MICHIGAN CHEMICAL CORPORATION
Michigan Chemical Corporation
Breckenridge, Michigan
License No: TERMINATED

Licensee Emergency Classification
Notification of Unusual Event
Alert
Site Area Emergency
General Emergency
X Not Applicable

Subject: RADIOACTIVE WASTE BURIAL SITE IDENTIFIED
(TERMINATED LICENSE NO. SMB-0833 AND STC-0833)

In response to information presented by the State of Michigan, NRC Region III (Chicago) dispatched two inspectors on October 31, 1996, to the former Michigan Chemical Corporation site (now Velsicol Chemical Corporation), Breckenridge, Michigan, to conduct a scoping radiological survey. Two State of Michigan inspectors were also part of the survey team. The site was used for burials of low-level radioactive waste from 1965 to 1971 as permitted by Atomic Energy Commission regulations in effect at that time. The regulations imposed limits on the amount of radioactivity buried and on the spacing and frequency of the burials.

The scoping survey was conducted on a two to three acre parcel in a rural farm area. Approximately one half to one acre of the area was found to have surface contamination. This was unexpected. Ground surface gamma radiation surveys identified levels ranging from 30 microentgens per hour to 300 microroentgens per hour (natural background readings for the area range from seven to nine microentgens per hour). Of nine soil samples taken, six were found to be in excess of unrestricted guideline values. The six samples had ranges of thorium from 28 picocuries per gram (1.0 becquerels per gram) to 302 picocuries per gram (11.2 becquerels per gram) (NRC's site release guideline for thorium is 10 picocuries per gram). Uranium in the samples ranged from 35 picocuries per gram (1.3 becquerels per gram) to 390 picocuries per gram (14.4 becquerels per gram) (NRC's site release guideline for uranium is 30 picocuries per gram) (1.1 becquerels per gram)).

Soil samples were also taken of drainage tiles at a stream adjacent to the site. No radioactivity above natural background levels was found. On November 12, the licensee erected a security fence to restrict the area. NRC Region III will issue an inspection report and evaluate the site for possible inclusion into NRC's Site Decommissioning Management Plan.

The State of Michigan and the NRC Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards have been notified of the inspection results. This information is current as of 7:00 a.m. (CST) on November 15, 1996.

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