

official

70-143

Nuclear Fuel Service, Inc.
ATTN: Mr. F. K. Guinn
Plant Manager
Erwin, TN 37650

JUN 13 1985

Gentlemen:

SUBJECT: INVESTIGATION OF HEALTH AND SAFETY CONCERNS

We recently received a copy of a letter dated May 3, 1985, from the Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW) which was addressed to Mr. Elliot Ross Buckley, Chairman of the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission. This letter stated several concerns involving activities at your facility. In addition, we have received a copy of a similar letter dated May 9, 1985, which was addressed to Mr. Alan S. Rosenthal, Chairman of the NRC Atomic Safety & Licensing Appeal Panel. Copies of both letters are enclosed for your review and action.

You are requested to investigate the concerns identified in the OCAW correspondence and advise us of your findings and any actions you take or propose regarding these matters. If you substantiate these concerns, please inform us of actions you initiate to correct the situation.

We intend to conduct a review of your investigation into these concerns including a review of corrective actions, if applicable. The potential seriousness of these matters warrants your immediate attention and we request a reply to this letter in writing within 10 days stating your proposed course of investigative action. Also, we request that your final investigative report and conclusions be submitted to us by July 31, 1985.

Should you have any questions concerning this matter, please contact Mr. K. P. Barr, Chief, Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards Branch, at 404/221-5612. Mr. Barr will coordinate your questions and/or requests with the appropriate members of Region II Technical Staff.

Your assistance and cooperation in this matter is appreciated.

/s/ J. Phillip Stohr

J. Philip Stohr, Director
Division of Radiation Safety
and Safeguards

Enclosures:
As Stated

cc: J. Williams, OCAW


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
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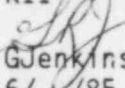
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
JUN 13 1985

bcc: Document Control Desk
M. Bridges, EDO
L. Cobb, IE
W. Crow, NMSS
T. Lee, RI
G. Jenkins
State of Tennessee

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GJenkins
6/12/85

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Bridges
6/12/85

OCAW



Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers
International Union, AFL-CIO

John Williams, Director, District 3
Suite 308
1800 Winston Road
Knoxville, Tennessee 37918
615/990-6919

May 9, 1985

Mr. Alan S. Rosenthal, Chairman
Atomic Safety & Licensing Appeal Panel
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Matomic Building
1717 H Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20555

Re: Nuclear Fuel Services
Erwin, Tennessee

Dear Mr. Rosenthal:

As the certified exclusive collective bargaining representative of the employees at Nuclear Fuel Services, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union files this formal complaint with your agency and urgently requests an immediate investigation of health and safety practices at NFS. We believe that life-endangering conditions exist at this facility, where our constituents work with highly enriched radioactive materials.

The Union learned a few days ago, through the attached newspaper article, that the facility has been fined for overexposing employees and other violations. Through the same article we learned of a previous large fine assessed last July. The Company has not furnished us with information about the incidents leading to the over-exposures, the number of employees involved, or the corrective measures taken, if any.

Moreover, our own preliminary investigation among the employees reveals further evidence that the Company is acting in utter disregard for the health and safety of its personnel. For example:

1. The vending machines in the break area of the navy fuel building register over four times MPC (i. e. over 2,000 DPM) inside the machines, indicating serious contamination of the eating area from a source as yet unidentified.
2. The Company has instituted a new fuel processing method without adequate training of employees and is requiring employees to sign statements attached to Company Standard Operating Procedures indicating that they understand the procedures. When the employees protest that they do not understand the procedures because of lack of training, the Company requires them to sign on threat of discharge. Resident NRC Inspector Tom Lee has been present on at least one occasion when employees have been forced to sign.
3. Recently a UF₆ cylinder was emptied of its contents in the metals building, irradiating an employee and discharging the contents of the cylinder into the atmosphere. The Company

WJC

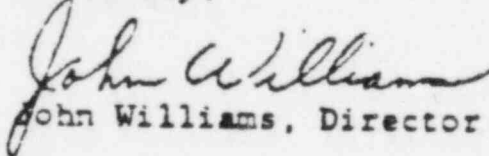
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opened the windows and doors to let the material escape, decontaminated the worker and sent him back to work without ascertaining the extent of his exposure. No high volume air samples were taken. The emissions were simply released into the environment.

4. An employee was exposed to radioactive contaminants in the high-enriched scrap building. The Company took a nasal swab and a urine sample. One health and safety officer told the employee to work in a cold area such as the laundry room until his urine sample could be evaluated, but Andy Maxin, another health and safety officer, ordered the employee back to work in the area in which he had been exposed. The employee's urine count was in fact unacceptably high when read.
5. Continuous air monitors are placed outside the three-foot limit in several areas of the facility.
6. Supervisors and nonunit salaried-employees have been observed working in roped-off contaminated areas without respiratory protection in violation of NRC regulations and plant rules.
7. In the eating areas, health and safety monitors have been instructed to confine their smear testing to spots known to present a low probability of contamination instead of allowed to sample freely and at random throughout the area.

These are only a few examples of the manner in which the Company is presently operating its plant. We consider these incidents completely incompatible with the Company's obligation to maintain a healthy and safe working environment. The conditions we describe in a facility using highly enriched radioactive materials in amounts that pose a genuine nuclear hazard of mishandled materials are creating an abnormally dangerous working environment and a serious threat to the community. Your prompt response is urgently requested.

Sincerely,


John Williams, Director

JW:ruf

cc: Senator Albert Gore, Jr.
Senator James Sasser
Nunzio J. Palladino, Chairman NRC
James K. Asselstine, Commissioner NRC
Frederick M. Bernthal, Commissioner NRC
Thomas M. Robert, Commissioner NRC
Lindow W. Zech, Jr., Commissioner NRC
Lonnie Tolley, President Local 3-677 OCAWIU
Robert Wages, Vice President OCAWIU
Dan Edwards, Health & Safety Director, OCAWIU

May 3, 1985

U.S. Navy's fuel supplier fined

The Associated Press

ERWIN — Nuclear Fuel Services Inc., supplier of fuel to the Navy's nuclear fleet, has been fined \$18,750 for safety violations, including releases of radioactive materials into the workplace.

The penalty, which Nuclear Fuel Services has 30 days to appeal, resulted from four inspections by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Atlanta staff. NRC spokesman Ken Clark said Thursday.

The other violations cited were:

- failure to prepare and adhere to radiation work permits related to non-routine work activities;

- failure to perform adequate evaluations of employee exposures and to conduct surveys for airborne radioactivity.

In a letter to Nuclear Fuel Services, NRC Region 2 Administrator Dr. J. Nelson Grace, said his staff was "concerned that violations may have resulted in the exposure of an employee to concentrations of airborne radioactive material in excess of federal limits."

The number of violations "and the time period over which they were observed indicate programmatic weaknesses in the plant's health and safety program," Grace wrote.

The inspections were conducted from October 1984 through January 1985, Clark said.

In a separate action, James M. Taylor, director of the NRC Office

of Inspection and Enforcement in Washington informed the company that a July 1984 fine of \$100,000 had been reduced to \$50,000.

Taylor said the decision was made after NRC officials viewed corrections made by Nuclear Fuel Services.

OCAW



Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers
International Union, AFL-CIO

John Williams, Director, District 3
Suite 306
1900 Winston Road
Knoxville, Tennessee 37919
615/690-6915

May 3, 1985

MAY 07 1985
8:19

Mr. Elliott Ross Buckley, Chairman
Occupational Safety & Health Review Commission
1825 K Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20006

Re: Nuclear Fuel Service
Erwin, Tennessee

OFFICE OF
THE COMMISSIONER
MAY 5 1 01 PM '85

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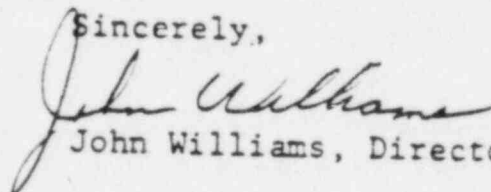
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