

# Nuclear plant fails to report accident

**United Press International**  
HOUSTON — The Texas Department of Health has indefinitely suspended the operating license of Gulf Nuclear Inc.'s Webster plant for failure to report an accident Feb. 8 which may have contaminated as many as nine employees.

Richard Ratliff, director of radiation compliance for TDH, said the action was taken Monday after inspectors confirmed a report from a company employee that a capsule containing Americium 241 was inadvertently sliced in half.

The radioactive isotope is

used in petroleum industry equipment. The firm makes and handles radioactive materials for the petroleum and medical industries.

Ratliff said preliminary tests indicate that two employees have some level of radiation in their bodies because of the Feb. 8 incident. He said tests have been ordered for seven others.

"When it (Americium 241) gets into the body, it doesn't pose an immediate threat," Ratliff said. "You're looking at long-term effects, such as increased chances of cancer and things like that."

"The reason we ordered

the company to send the people to the lab is you need to find out early if radioactive material is present so they can be treated."

Ratliff said the health department also required the company to outline corrective steps for preventing similar accidents and announced that a full inspection will be conducted at the facility within two weeks.

"The suspension of the license was occasioned by a recent minor contamination occurring within a restricted area of the Webster facility," a Gulf Nuclear prepared statement read.

# Jobless rate up for Houston

**United Press International**  
HOUSTON — Unemployment in the Houston area rose to 9.7 percent in February, according to state figures, and an analyst warned the rate could rise beyond 10 percent because of the persistent slowdown in the oil industry.

In January, the Texas Employment Commission put joblessness in the six-county Houston area at 9.1 percent.

But according to new figures released Tuesday, the figure had risen 0.6 percent — with 172,000 residents jobless in February compared to 164,000 in January.

A record 80,000 residents filed unemployment benefit claims in February. A year ago, TEC handled about 15,000 jobless benefit claims in February.

Houston now handles more claims than Dallas, Fort Worth and San Antonio combined.

"If we continue to experience a reduction in manufacturing employment — this is our main area of concern — it's possible the 10 percent rate will happen," TEC analyst Joel Terry said.

TEC reported unemployment statewide climbed from 8.5 percent to 8.8 percent from January to February. Most of the statewide increase came from a reduction in the retail sales force, analysts said.

Officials said the state figures released Tuesday were not directly comparable with U.S. Labor Department unemployment reports because the labor Department adjusts for seasonal changes while the state does not.

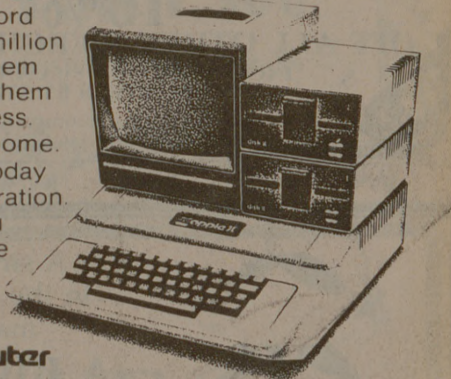
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# Ticketing may replace jailing in 'sin' offenses

**United Press International**  
AUSTIN — Marijuana smokers, prostitutes and gamblers would be ticketed instead of booked into jail immediately under a bill which has been approved by a legislative committee and has been sent to the House for debate.

The bill, allowing traffic-type citations for offenses including possession of less than two ounces of marijuana, prostitution, gambling and homosexual conduct, was harshly opposed by the Texas' War on Drugs Committee in earlier hearings before the House Criminal Jurisprudence Committee. The

committee voted 6-1 in favor of the measure Tuesday.

War on Drugs members said the bill would give young people the impression that "it's OK to do drugs, it's not bad to be a homosexual, and it's OK to be a prostitute."

The measure originally would have allowed ticketed offenders to send their attorneys to represent them in court within 10 days of receiving the citations. But committee members amended the proposal to require offenders to appear in court personally and to be booked, fingerprinted and photographed within 48 hours

of receiving the citations.

Supporters said the measure, by Rep. Bill Blanton, D-Farmers Branch, would free busy police officers from time-consuming booking procedures.

"This will allow the officer to remain out on the streets rather than booking at the station," said committee member Rep. Terral Smith, D-Austin.

Rep. Tom Waldrop, D-Corsicana, was the only committee member to oppose the bill. He said young marijuana smokers should be subjected to "the trauma of being hauled into jail" rather than ticketed for the offense.

# Legislature considers bills on farm worker insurance

**United Press International**  
AUSTIN — Farmers claimed that a bill to place farm laborers under workmen's compensation insurance would result in higher food prices for consumers, but supporters of the measure told legislative committees that farm workers must be insured against injuries in their dangerous occupation.

A Senate committee voted 6-4 Tuesday in favor of a bill that would require growers with annual payrolls of more than \$50,000 to provide workmen's compensation insurance for their employees.

A House committee debating a similar bill with a \$20,000 payroll cut-off sent the measure to a subcommittee for further study.

Supporters claimed that a state law adopted in 1913 unfairly excluded farm laborers from workmen's compensation coverage because agricultural work was considered relatively safe.

"Things have changed since then," said Rep. Juan Hinojosa, D-McAllen, who sponsored one of the bills. "Statistics now show farm work is the second most dangerous work."

"We are always trying to help the farmer, and they need our

help, but we also need to help the farm workers who work out there in the field and put the food on our tables."

A Roman Catholic nun who works with the United Farm

Workers Union in the Rio Grande Valley testified that the only recourse available to poorly-paid farm laborers who are injured on the job is court suits against their employers, which most workers can't afford.

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