

state

Worker contaminated in radiation incident

United Press International
HOUSTON — Preliminary tests at a Gulf Nuclear Inc. company's Webster plant show an employee's lungs contain about 13 times the allowable level of a radioactive material, a health official said.

The man, who was operating a lathe at the plant Feb. 8 when the device sliced a sealed capsule of Americium-241 in half, has about 200 nanocuries of the radioactive material in his lungs, said Ed Bailey, director of licensing, regulations and standards for the Texas Bureau of Radiation Control.

The health department has indefinitely suspended the operating license of the plant for failure to report the accident in which as many as eight other employees also may have been contaminated.

The employee who reported the incident in a letter to state officials was fired, Bailey said Wednesday.

A Houston attorney representing the company said the employee was fired for excessive absences, not for reporting the incident.

Richard Ratliff, the Texas Health Department's director of

radiation compliance, said preliminary tests indicate two employees have some level of radiation in their bodies as a result of the Feb. 8 incident. He said tests had been ordered for seven others.

"When it (Americium-241) gets into the body, it doesn't impose 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," he said.

Ratliff said officials believed the accident posed no danger to the general public in the area of Webster, on the southern edge of Harris County near the Johnson Space Center.

Officials call EPA order a risk to Dallas children

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Hundreds of poor Dallas children were affected by a deputy Environmental Protection Agency administrator's decision to stop plans for the cleanup of lead-contaminated soil, regional EPA officials testified today.

Three officials of the Dallas regional EPA office told a House subcommittee they disagreed with then deputy EPA administrator John Hernandez' decision. Hernandez ordered that more health tests be con-

ducted before owners of three smelters be forced to clean up the lead-contaminated soil in schoolyards and playgrounds within a 2-mile radius of their plants.

The EPA officials said the owner of one smelter, RSR Corp., said it would undertake any necessary cleanup.

During testimony last week before the subcommittee, Hernandez denied knowing any of the firms had agreed to pay for their own cleanup.

"I think he might have forgot-

ten," Deputy Regional Administrator Frances Phillips of Dallas said Thursday.

She said Hernandez had been on the job just 15 days when first contacted about results of a Dallas EPA study indicating the high-lead levels in the blood of school children could have been caused by playing in lead-contaminated soil.

She said the regional office recommended that the owners of three smelters clean up soil with lead levels above 1,000 parts per million in poor west

and south Dallas neighborhoods while further studies are conducted to see if soil lead levels also should be tested.

"Dr. Hernandez said he didn't believe the lead should be a standard," Phillips said. "He said I think we should spend money to remove dirt and bulldozers until we identify the specific health problems of the

Waste site search hindered

United Press International
AUSTIN — A bill that could hinder the federal government's search for a high level radioactive waste disposal facility in the Texas Panhandle has been approved by a state Senate committee concerned about water contamination.

Two of the seven sites being studied by the federal Department of Energy, which must reduce its list to three by August, are in Texas. Other sites under consideration are in Washington, Nevada, Utah, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Of the three finalists, DOE must recommend one to the president by 1987.

The Senate Natural Resources Committee unanimously approved a bill by Sen. Bill Sarpalius, D-Hereford, that would force DOE to obtain a permit from the Texas Water Commission before it drills a deep test shaft in Deaf Smith County.

DOE is also considering a site in Swisher County. Both Texas sites are salt dome formations.

Sarpalius told the committee he is worried about the effects of drilling a shaft in the giant Ogallala Aquifer, a deep reserve of underground water shared by six states.

In addition to requiring DOE to get a state permit, DOE would also have to prove to the state that the drilling would not affect current or future oil or gas reserves.

Also, a permit could not be issued in Texas if DOE is involved in litigation in other states under consideration for the disposal site.

Sierra Club spokesman Ken Kramer said the environmental group agrees with the concept of Sarpalius' bill, but does not believe it goes far enough.

"Texas has not committed

money to begin its own search to plan a strategy to deal with the waste," he said.

Kramer proposed the Texas Legislature appropriate money to permit state officials to review the potential of Texas as the disposal site. He also suggested the state policy on negotiating DOE on the use of a fee

David Escamilla, a spokesman for Sarpalius, said the bill is designed to protect crucial supplies.

"If we (Texas) do not have assurances, it (the bill) won't be issued," he said. "The bill also gives us the right to receive all information Texas can keep up with, and we can avoid dangers."

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