

State and Local

Official: Chernobyl meltdown caused by mixture of failures

By Charisse Crunk
Reporter

A mixture of human and technical failures caused the April 26 meltdown of the Soviet Union's Chernobyl nuclear power plant, a Nuclear Regulatory Commission official said Friday.

Harold R. Denton, director of the Nuclear Reactor Regulation, a branch of the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission, made the comments to an audience of Texas A&M nuclear engineering students and graduates that had gathered for the 25th anniversary of A&M's Department of Nuclear Engineering.

Denton had just returned from a meeting in Vienna, Austria, of the International Atomic Energy Agency, a division of the United Nations. At the meeting, Soviet officials briefed representatives from 113 nations on the causes of the disaster.

"If I had to summarize the causes of the accident," Denton said, "I'd say it was multiple and deliberate violations of procedure, coupled with design deficiencies."

He said a main factor in the

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—Harold R. Denton,
Nuclear Regulatory Commission official

meltdown was "a large dose of human error." Soviets neglected to follow six safety procedures, he said, and compliance with any one of the six would have prevented the disaster.

He said the Soviets were aware of the shortcomings of the reactor design, but thought they had everything under control.

The design used by the Soviets is a positive coefficient reactor, which increases radioactivity when reactivities are added to its core, Denton said. American engineers tested this type of design about 25 years ago and found it unacceptable, he said.

The United States uses a negative coefficient reactor, which shuts itself down if it becomes too radioactive, he explained.

Denton said the Soviet design becomes more critical as reactivities

are added to its core because it lacks the self-limiting factor that American design has.

Denton said containment also was a contributing factor in the disaster.

He said most Soviet reactors have no containment at all, but this particular plant did have at least some.

He said although some parts of the building housing the reactor were contained, the reactor core, the most important part, had no containment at all. American reactors, he explained, are contained in a full building covering the reactor core.

He told the audience that the preliminary opinion of the NRC is that the disaster might have been prevented had the reactor had Western-style containment.

He pointed out that the disaster

gives scientists an opportunity to research the health effects of low doses of radiation over time.

"I think you could support a thousand doctoral dissertations if you could get the Soviets' cooperation," he said.

He said the disaster has opened the door for Soviet and American scientific exchange, a door that Denton said has been closed for years.

"Many of the things that were adopted in this country after Three Mile Island, the Soviets are suddenly quite interested in," he said.

Denton said the disaster will have limited impacts on U.S. reactors. He said he could not imagine any power company in the United States bypassing safety procedures.

He said the NRC will be taking another look at the administration of controls and operations and re-examine the design. It also will look at the adequacy of containment and prepare a report to determine if anything needs to be changed in the United States, he said.

Holmes: Changes at yell practice worked just fine

By Jo Ann Able
Staff Writer

Head Yell Leader Marty Holmes said Sunday that Friday's midnight yell practice went "extremely well" and was probably the best of the year.

A fight broke out at yell practice Oct. 3 when a group of civilians tried to run across Kyle Field and cadets tried to stop it.

In a letter to *The Battalion* on Oct. 16, Holmes said the Corps of Cadets would no longer prevent anyone from running on the field or attempt to remove anyone who did. He also asked students to cooperate with the yell leaders by staying off the field during yell practice.

Holmes said these changes worked at yell practice, although, there were a few problems.

He was probably referring to a skirmish that occurred when some civilian students stopped an attempt by others to go onto the field.

"Everything went fine," Holmes said. "That's what we plan to keep on doing."

Holmes said he invited Head Coach Jackie Sherrill to speak at yell practice and address the problem.

Sherrill attended and urged the crowd to follow tradition and stay off the field.

Bass players also began marching with the Aggie Band Friday night. In the past, bass players lined up on the sidelines to remove those who ran onto the field.

Holmes said this is a permanent change, but juniors in the Corps will continue to escort the band into the stadium and will remain on the track.

Correction

In the Oct. 13 edition of *The Battalion*, Hugh H. Hughes was incorrectly identified in a headline as a professor.

He is actually a teaching assistant from the Department of Interdisciplinary Education. *The Battalion* regrets the error.

Brazos Beautiful tries to make residents litter-conscious

By Paula Janda
Reporter

A vacant lot in the Brazos Valley has almost no trash — only an empty Coke can and a small crumpled piece of newspaper.

Several vacant lots in the Brazos Valley have been cleaned up, straightened up and cleared out. And many parking lots, commercial dumpsters, loading docks and streets have received facelifts.

Diane Mills, executive coordinator of Brazos Beautiful, says her organization is the primary reason for these transformations.

Brazos Beautiful, a non-profit organization, is part of the Clean Community Sys-

tem, which is sponsored by Keep America Beautiful, a national organization. The organization strives to make people conscious of litter and reduce the amount of littering.

"We just have tried to teach people not to litter," Mills says. "When people are aware it makes a difference."

Mills says the Brazos Valley is 75 percent cleaner since the program's inception in 1983.

Every six months Bryan-College Station officials spend several days taking pictures of streets, parking lots, vacant lots, commercial dumpsters, and loading docks, Mills says. Each city takes 70 pictures that

"We want picking up trash and not littering to become a way of life." — Diane Mills, executive coordinator of Brazos Beautiful.

are used to measure the amount of litter in a particular area, she says.

Jane Lee, a College Station zoning official, says the areas to be surveyed are kept secret and are chosen from a random set of numbers.

"The photos are taken before trash pick-up days to assure no area has an advantage

because its trash was just picked up," Lee says.

Mills says the pictures are projected on a grid, and the litter is actually counted so a percentage can be determined.

"All areas were greatly improved and the percentages help us see where we need to improve," she says.

Vacant lots showed the largest improvement with a 96 percent reduction in litter, Mills says. Commercial trash dumpsters need the most improvement, she adds.

"We want picking up trash and not littering to become a way of life," Mills says. "If a place looks better, it is economically better for businesses. And people work better if

they are in a clean and beautiful environment."

Brazos Beautiful is trying to change people's attitudes about littering, Mills says.

"We are trying to teach behavioral modification," Mills says. "We are educating young children in schools."

"We teach the kids that waste has a place, and we teach them the difference between a paper cup and a leaf on the ground," she says.

"Go wild in Brazos County" is our newest program," she says. "We want people to plant more wildflowers along highways and at the entrances to the cities," she says.



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