

Common Sense

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Events around stack releases verify

Utah incinerator dangerously out of control

On May 8 at 11:26 p.m., following an attempt to clear a jam in a feed chute leading to the Deactivation Furnace (DFS), there was a confirmed release of the nerve agent GB (Sarin) out the stack of the Army's Utah chemical weapons incinerator. At 12:28 a.m. May 9, just an hour later, nerve agent was again released.

Prior to the jam and subsequent leaks, M-56 warheads containing "gelled" nerve agent were being processed in the DFS, a procedure which, according to Jason Groenewold, of Families Against Incinerator Risk (FAIR), is dangerous and has magnified the historic problems with the furnace and its feed chutes. "The DFS has consistently had problems even when used as designed--for burning drained munitions," Groenewold commented. "Trying to burn munitions with gelled agent that can't be removed before processing goes way beyond the design parameters and ensures that there will be more and more problems and more and more chemical events."

Compounding the danger of a furnace being operated outside its parameters, is the poor management of the facility by the Army and its contractor EG&G, as evidenced by the inept activities during the May 8-9 incidents. These actions included: inability to locate approved procedures for the circumstances; use of several inappropriate and unapproved procedures; miscommunications between operators; disbelief of the agent monitors; poor decisions by an inexperienced operator who was allowed to handle the upset furnace; and inattentiveness on the part of the control room supervisor.

The two releases, caused by system failures and mismanagement, led to the shut down of the incinerator and investigations by the Army, the State of Utah Department of Environmental Quality, EG&G and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), whose function is to provide public health oversight for the facility.

Although the final investigative reports don't adequately address the inherent system design flaws nor the increased problems with the DFS, they do provide major clues to the chaos and complacency that reign at the disabled facility. The reports point to a disturbing lack of control over the high temperature/high pressure technology that has fast moving toxic gasses and an open smokestack to the outdoors.

The following examples of an increasingly complex system out of control were gleaned from the reports.

- There is a recent trend toward more frequent events. In March there were 22 events, in April 25 events and in May there were 10 events before the facility was shut down May 9.
- Operating procedures are not sufficiently detailed to ensure the safe and proper operation of the plant.
- The latest revisions of procedures are not necessarily the ones being used. Revisions are happening so fast that it is difficult to keep up.

(Go to Page 2 for more.)

And in Alabama...

State Environmental Board refuses to hear oral arguments

In a meeting of the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) June 20, the commissioners refused to allow citizens to state their objections to the permit of Anniston's chemical weapons incinerator. ADEM's imminent denial of the citizens' appeal of the incinerator permit brought the protesters to the meeting.



Who is that masked man? Could it be Mike Marvinny standing next to Suzanne Marshall?



Rufus Kinney of Anniston was a vocal protester at the ADEM Board Meeting.

Utah incinerator dangerously out of control (Continued from Page 1)

What is it going to take for the Army to finally admit that low temperature advanced technologies with no smokestacks are safer than incineration? I hope it's not a body bag.

--Jason Groenewold

- Corrective Actions are taking an excessive amount of time to close--a year or more. Many are closed by opening change proposals instead of completing the work.
- The agent alarm system is not trustworthy. Operators and supervisors have become complacent about agent alarms because of the myriad "false.positive" alarms that occur. In the 96 days from January 1, 2000 to April 5, 2000, there were 197 ACAMS alarms, and 80 of these were false positive alarms.
- The water spray system as designed increases the potential for excessive moisture and agent alarms can become ineffective when there are high moisture conditions.
- There is no evidence that lessons learned from the Lessons Learned Program have been implemented at the Utah incinerator.
- Jamming of the DFS feed chutes has been a recurring problem at the facility and regularly causes difficulties.
- The scrubber, the water spray and the exhaust fan systems don't function efficiently under normal conditions.
- Operators and managers do not understand the necessary conditions for agent destruction.
- Operators are working under the impression that production is more important than safety.
- Because operators and supervisors don't understand the system for measuring agent levels they work with a "false sense of security."

"We might as well have the Keystone Kops running the incinerator," said Groenewold. "The Army insists that its incineration technology is safe and 'mature.' A system where no one knows exactly what is going on and where working outside design parameters is an accepted practice is hardly safe. And a system that has had more than 500 permit modifications and 350 engineering changes in four years is hardly mature. What is it going to take for the Army to finally admit that low temperature advanced technologies with no smokestacks are safer than incineration? I hope it's not a body bag."

The Utah incinerator facility started limited operations on July 28 after being completely shut down for 80 days at a cost of \$285,000 per day. Processing in the DFS is expected to resume sometime in August.

Common Sense is published by the **Kentucky Environmental Foundation (KEF)**, the non-profit lead organization of the **Chemical Weapons Working Group (CWWG)**, a coalition of grassroots organizations in the U.S., the Pacific and Russia working toward the safe disposal of chemical weapons. CWWG site contacts are listed below. KEF distributes newsletters on a quarterly basis, please call the KEF office at 606-986-0868 for submission deadlines. Suggestions are welcome.

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Actions precipitated by Utah agent releases ▶ ▶ ▶

▶ **Alabama Commissioners call for independent investigation**

To obtain answers to “vexing questions” surrounding the May 8-9 releases of chemical agent from the Utah chemical weapons incinerator, members of Alabama’s Calhoun County Commission wrote a strongly-worded letter to their federal legislators on May 25. There is a chemical weapons incinerator under construction in Anniston, Alabama, modelled after the Utah facility. In the letter to Sen. Jeff Sessions and Rep. Bob Riley, the Commissioners cast doubt on the Army’s ability to credibly investigate the incident itself. The letter points out that the Army “simply has too much at stake here and is far too involved with the current program to be objective in its evaluation of last week’s events at the [Utah] incinerator.” The Commissioners also make note of the following examples of Army negligence that night and in general:

- failure to notify local emergency response officials until three and a half hours after the event;
- failure to comply with operating procedures and permits;
- failure to use the most recent agent toxicity standards in protective action recommendations; and
- failure to implement the Lessons Learned program from one incinerator facility to the next.

In response to the Commissioners’ letter, Congressional hearings on the Utah releases have been scheduled to begin September 21.

▶ **Oregon Senators join in call for GAO review of Emergency Preparedness**

In the aftermath of the agent releases at the Utah incinerator, Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith joined with other members of Congress in requesting the General Accounting Office (GAO) to review the emergency preparedness of communities where chemical weapons are stored. Chemical weapons stockpiled in Umatilla, Oregon are slated for disposal by incineration.

Joining Congressional members from Utah and Alabama, Senators Wyden and Smith co-signed a letter to the GAO which states, “A recent release of GB (sarin) gas at the [Utah facility] has raised issues in some communities near chemical weapons storage sites about how effectively the [Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program] is managed and whether these communities are sufficiently prepared to respond to a chemical stockpile accident at the site.”

EPA finds broad applications for ACWA technologies

The Chemical Weapons Working Group (CWWG) has never been alone in its call for non-incineration technologies. Around the world communities threatened by military and commercial incinerators are looking for safe, environmentally sound clean-up methods. Now, as the successes of the Assembled Chemical Weapons Assessment (ACWA) program continue to unfold, more and more grassroots groups, regulators and government agencies are looking to ACWA as a possible solution for military and hazardous waste clean-up.

In its April 2000 draft report “Potential Applicability of [ACWA] Technologies to RCRA Waste Streams and Contaminated Media,” the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that “the potential market for ACWA technologies includes wastes that currently are treated by combustion and organic waste that are treated by other technologies or are disposed,” such as

pesticides, industrial chemicals, agricultural chemicals, medicinal chemicals and more. The report details each ACWA technology process and includes a list of other similar non-incineration systems from the EPA’s Technology Innovation Office database.

ACWA was created in 1997 after Congress directed the Department of Defense to identify and demonstrate non-incineration technologies for chemical weapons disposal. This Congressional directive, and the framework for the ACWA program, came as a direct result of pressure from CWWG. ACWA technologies were chosen based on their capability to meet a set of stringent criteria developed by the consensus of grassroots environmental advocates, state and federal regulators, local citizen leaders and the Department of Defense. Demonstrations of three non-incineration technologies were completed last year, with another three technolo-

gies demonstrating this summer.

ACWA technologies are superior to incineration in many ways, including their capability to prevent production of dioxins and furans. In light of EPA’s most recent dioxin reassessment, which estimates that the risks from human exposure to dioxins are ten times greater than previously thought, ACWA technologies are far more publicly acceptable than incineration. Whereas incinerator smoketsacks provide a direct route for toxic chemicals into the air, ACWA technologies can contain toxic by-products.

Using safe, clean disposal technologies is putting the Precautionary Principle into practice. The EPA’s report on ACWA technologies can help all anti-incineration groups get there. For more information on the ACWA program and the movement for advanced non-incineration technologies, please contact the CWWG at (859) 986-0868 or see our web site at www.cwwg.org

Oregon workers file suit claiming the Army covered up their exposure to chemical agent(s)

Last September, 34 construction workers were overcome by a toxic vapor while working in the Munitions Demilitarization Building (MDB) of the Umatilla, Oregon chemical weapons incinerator. It was reported that workers were falling, they were crying and they were retching. Almost a year after the incident Army officials insist that although no one knows what the vapor was, they're sure it wasn't nerve or mustard agents. In a lawsuit filed July 31, the Army's claim is disputed by 18 of the poisoned workers who are still suffering ill-effects from their exposure.

In their suit, the workers accuse the Army and its contractor Raytheon Demilitarization Corporation, Inc. of concealing leaks of Mustard and the nerve gas Sarin which made the workers sick. The workers allege that:

- the Army did not begin testing for chemical agents until more than three hours after the incident;
- both Mustard and Sarin gases were detected in the MDB after the event; and
- the Army ignored symptoms consistent with chemical agent exposures.

James McCandlish, attorney for the workers said that the suit would be used to pry open Army and Raytheon secrets, including what killed the rabbit that was found dead in an area where Mustard was detected.

The suit asks for a stop-construction injunction and seeks compensation from Raytheon for permanent damage to the workers. OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) fined Raytheon \$5000 for not providing prompt medical services to the sickened men. At a press conference, David Bosley, a former mill wright, said that if wasn't for the grace of God, he's sure the workers would have died. Bosley has spent time in four hospitals and has not returned to work.

CWWG has joined with the injured workers and their attorneys in calling for suspension of the construction and operation of all Army incinerators pending an independent investigation of the Oregon incident. Karyn Jones, a local resident and founder of the anti-incineration group GASP, said, "If the Army and contractors are so inept as to let these incidents occur during construction, I hate to think what will happen if they are allowed to burn these lethal agents in incinerators that disperse effluents through open stacks into our community."

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I say
mustard gas
killed the
Umatilla
bunny