

"One of worst nuclear accidents" Plant still leaks radiation

HARRISBURG, PA (AP) — Radiation leaks from the Three Mile Island nuclear plant continued today, authorities said, as a debate grew over what was described as one of the most serious such incidents in this country's history.

Officials of Metropolitan Edison Co., owner and operator of the plant, said minor levels of radiation were measured this morning two to three miles away and that it may be Friday before the leaks are stopped altogether.

They said the radiation was escaping through a ventilation system and from a sump designed to remove water after it has cooled the reactor.

"We concede that it's not just a little thing," said Don Curry, a representative for the company.

"In terms of publicity it will probably surpass the Browns Ferry incident."

But John Herbein, a Metropolitan Edison vice president for generation, said, "There is presently no danger to the public health or safety."

"We didn't injure anybody, we didn't over-expose anybody and we certainly didn't kill

anybody," he added.

Herbein said that of the 100 to 120 employees in the reactor area at the time of Wednesday's accident, only 10 to 15 had to be decontaminated with showers.

The officials told a news conference that it may be several days before workmen will be able to enter the reactor building to assess the damage because of a large amount of radioactive water.

As for what caused the accident, Walter Creitz, president of Metropolitan Edison, said, "I'm not ruling out human error."

Until now, a March 1975 fire in the control room of the Browns Ferry nuclear plant in Alabama has generally been considered this nation's most dangerous incident involving a nuclear reactor.

Near Harrisburg, low level radiation was detected in the air as far as 16 miles away Wednesday after an apparent valve failure resulted in excessive pressure being built up in the water used to cool the reactor core at Three Mile Island.

Thursday morning, Herbein

said, investigators detected radiation levels at 5 to 7 millirems per hour as far as 2 to 3 miles from the plant. Individuals are exposed to up to 30 millirems in a single X-ray examination.

Radiation was released when "hot" water was diverted to the auxiliary building, where clean water normally is cooled. Then plant officials vented steam from the building without knowing it came from radioactive water. The wind spread the particles away from the site.

"Nothing critical failed, but it's a dirty problem that's going to take some time to clean up," said Charles Gallina, an investigator with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Gallina called it one of the worst nuclear accidents on record, saying the problem was not the amount of radiation released, but the wide area of exposure.

William Dornsife, nuclear expert for the state Department of Environmental Resources, said he expected to see traces of radioactive isotope iodine 131 showing up in milk within a week.

"We will be checking milk supplies and other materials to see what was picked up — and checking people," he said at a news briefing.

Gallina said investigators would zero in on why a valve feeding to a water pump closed when it should have stayed open. However, Babcock and Wilcox Co., manufacturers of the water pump, denied there was a valve failure.

"The utility told us that it was failure of a valve due to the emergency cooling down system," Lt. Governor William Scranton said at a news briefing. "We have to take their word at this time for today's purposes. But this will be investigated, no doubt about it."

Atiyeh asks more hearings on nuke plants

SALEM (AP) — Gov. Vic Atiyeh asked Thursday that hearings on two nuclear power plants proposed for Arlington in north-central Oregon be reopened to consider safety precautions in light of a radiation leak in Pennsylvania.

"I am not suggesting that the Three Mile Island incident near Harrisburg demonstrates a hazard in connection with existing or proposed nuclear facilities in Oregon," Atiyeh wrote Chairman Allen Nistad of the state Energy Facility Council.

"At the same time, it becomes imperative for the council to assure itself that there are adequate safeguards in terms of design and procedures which ensure the safety of Oregonians," Atiyeh said.

Nistad, of Heppener, was en route to Portland and not immediately available for comment.

The \$3.5 billion Pebble Springs project has been under consideration for six years, and was tied up in court appeals for nearly two years after the council approved a site certificate in 1975.

Bill forbids age, sex to affect insurance

By DANA TIMS
Of the Emerald

SALEM — Rep. Mae Yih, D-Albany, is one of the legislature's reading advocates of government non-involvement in business. Cynics label her the representative from Wah Chang.

But Yih, at the request of the grey Panthers, the Oregon AFL-CIO and OSPERG, has introduced a bill that would direct the state insurance commissioner to oversee implementation of a merit rating system for automobile insurance.

House Bill 2795 prohibits insurance companies from using age, sex, or marital status as determinants when setting premium rates, a direction that would run contrary to current practice.

"Last session the legislature mandated that drivers have liability insurance," explained Yih. "Therefore, the state has a duty to see that it can be obtained at a reasonable price."

Discrimination based on age, sex, or marital status "is completely unacceptable," Yih testified Thursday night at a hearing on the bill held by the Senate Committee on Labor, Consumer, and Business Affairs.

In Marion County a twenty-year-old single male with a good driving record could pay \$379 per year for insurance with Allstate and \$498 with State Farm, Yih said.

However, a middle-aged person with the same driving record might pay as little as \$112 and \$140, with those same companies.

"We oppose the imposition of arbitrary restriction by outside forces on any efforts of insurance companies to apply individual or territorial differentials," said Charles Huggins, legislative chair for the Independent Insurance Agents of Oregon, whose clients write 65 percent of the total property and casualty insurance in the state.

making the news

From Associated Press Reports

PORTLAND — The Industrial Forestry Association announced Wednesday it was filing to intervene in a suit against a government ban on the use of some herbicides.

Dow Chemical Co. is suing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency over an emergency ban on the use of 2, 4, 5-T and Silvex to suppress brush and weeds in forests being used for logging. Dow manufactures 2, 4, 5-T.

A trial of the suit will begin April 3 in U.S. District Court in Michigan.

"We agree with the complaint that the EPA decision was arbitrary and capricious," said Bill Hagenstein, executive vice president of the association.

QUEBEC — A Quebecair passenger plane crashed into a hill and burned shortly after taking off from Ancienne Lorette airport Thursday night, killing at least 13 of the 24 persons aboard, an airline representative said.

Police said at least eight persons on the F-27 twin-engine turboprop were injured. Representatives at four hospitals where the injured were taken said two victims were near death.

The plane, Flight 255 bound for Montreal, hit the ground at 6:45 p.m. EST about 3,300 feet from the airport runway.

"He (the pilot) took off from Quebec and recorded a defect in one of his engines," Vachon said. "He asked to return to the airport, but he didn't have time."

WASHINGTON — Pres. Carter, described as ready to lift price controls from domestically produced crude oil, told congressional leaders Thursday he expects to announce his decision early next week.

Sen. Russell Long, D-La., chair of the Senate Finance Committee, later told reporters he thinks Carter will opt for gradual price decontrol, coupled with a tax aimed at denying the oil industry excess profits.

Long, whose committee handles tax legislation in the Senate, said he would expect passage of a tax bill if it were tied to a total lifting of price ceilings on crude oil.

If Carter does decide on gradual decontrol, Long said, the fate of the tax legislation would be "anybody's guess."

MOSCOW — A merchant seaman who blew himself up in the U.S. embassy after he was denied a visa had a history of mental illness and spent six months in a psychiatric hospital last year, Soviet sources said today.

They identified the man as Yuri Vlasenko, of Ukrainian nationality.

The man, who said he "hated" Soviet Pres. Leonid Brezhnev and wanted to go to America, killed himself in the embassy Wednesday night after an eight-hour siege, authorities said. They said he set off a bomb strapped to his waist when Soviet police called in by U.S. Ambassador Malcolm Toon tried to force him out of the building.

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