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March 31, 2009

BY REGULAR MAIL
FOIA Officer
United States Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585
Phone (202) 586-5955

APR 13 2009 08

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Dear FOIA Public Liaison:

This is a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

I request that a copy of the following documents (or documents containing the following information) be provided to me (identify the documents or information as specifically as possible):

> On July 2, 1956, there was an accident at the Sylvania Electric Products Company plant in Bayside, New York in which an explosion occurred in the metallurgy laboratory.
>
> Nine people were injured and special agents and teams were sent by the Atomic Energy Commission. I am requesting to obtain all available records regarding this accident. I am enclosing a newspaper article from the New York Times that describe the accident for your reference.

In order to help to determine my status to assess fees, you should know that I am (select one):

- ☐ An individual seeking information for personal use.
- ☐ Affiliated with an educational or noncommercial scientific institution, and this request is made for a scholarly purpose.
- ☒ Affiliated with a private corporation and seeking information for use in the company's business.
- ☐ A representative of the news media/press and this request is made as part of news gathering and not for commercial use.
- ☐ Affiliated with a public interest group and this request is not for commercial use.

FOIA-2009-000264

Jean

The maximum dollar amount I am willing to pay for this request is $1000.00. Please notify me if the fees will exceed $25.00 or the maximum dollar amount I entered.

☐ I request a waiver of all fees for this request. Disclosure of the requested information to me is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government and is not primarily in my commercial interest.

Specific explanation for waiver of fees (required if a waiver is requested):

N/A

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

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Encls.

9 Injured in Blast In Atom Plant Here

A double explosion in a Queens atomic research laboratory yesterday injured nine persons and created a wide but unnecessary scare of a radioactive fallout.

The two blasts of thorium, a mildly radioactive material, followed in split-second succession at 8:50 in the morning. They destroyed part of the two-story metallurgy center of the Sylvania Electric Products Company plant in the Clearview section of Bayside.

The explosions erupted at a time when the laboratory's entire personnel of 225 were at their benches and desks in the two-story, block-long building. They brought out a heavy array of firemen, policemen and military police and medical unit soldiers from Fort Totten, the Army base adjoining the atomic research plant.

Special agents and teams were

Continued on Page 15, Column 4

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The New York Times

PRECAUTION: In the wake of yesterday's explosion at the Sylvania Laboratories in Bayside, Queens, Jack Caulfield, left, plant technician, checks over Fireman John Beck for radioactivity on his person or in his equipment.

RESEARCH CENTER IS TORN BY BLASTS

Continued From Page 1

quickly sent by the Atomic Energy Commission, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, civil defense headquarters here, State Labor Department, and the Health Department's radiological bureau. They checked into possible radiation dangers, set up a light security wall around the plant and investigated whether espionage might have had anything to do with the explosion.

The explosions, described by Bayside residents as "two tremendous claps of thunder," set off immediate fears throughout the northeast section of Queens and in more distant stretches of the city that a radioactive fallout might start.

Telephone exchanges at the Atomic Energy Commission's headquarters at 70 Columbus Avenue and at many police stations were swamped with calls from worried residents.

After a swift on-the-spot check, however, the A. E. C. team reported that there was "no radiation hazard" outside the building where the blast had occurred. This finding was supplemented by a six-man team of experts from the State Labor Department, which reported that "contamination was essentially confined" to the single section of the metallurgy laboratory.

Radiation Checks Made

Emergency measures were established at once, however, to counter any radiation contact that may have been made by those who were in the laboratory building when the thorium ignited and by those who hurried to the scene.

The 200 Sylvania employes who were working in the company's other two buildings—the administrative building and a physics laboratory, both distant from the explosion—will not have to be checked for radioactive contamination, but the 225 technicians and clerical workers who were in the metallurgy laboratory must report this morning for a radiological examination.

Out of the seventy firemen who went to the scene, thirty-five will remain under observation. Five firemen, whose masks showed evidence of radioactivity, were given blood-count checks at Bellevue Hospital, and were ordered to return in three days for second checks.

The twenty-five policemen who were sent to the plant must undergo the same precautionary examinations. Eleven policemen who were close to the blast scene were sent to Queens General Hospital for their first checks and the others were instructed to report for checks as soon as possible.

Four of the employes who were injured in the blast were described last night as being in critical condition. Three of them were operated upon and the fourth is scheduled to undergo an operation this morning if his condition permits.

Santo Azzarello, 27 years old, a technician, of 163-46 Seventeenth Avenue, Whitestone, was taken to St. Alban's Naval Hospital suffering from a compound fracture of the left arm and groin lacerations.

John Szelwach, 28, also a technician, of 30-74 Thirty-third Street, Long Island City, was operated on at St. Alban's to remove multiple metal fragments from his body. He was also suffering from second and third-degree burns.

Alec Hasapis, 51, a technician, who lives at 28-09 154th Street, Flushing, was operated on last night at Flushing Hospital for lacerations in the groin. He was also suffering from second and third degree burns.

Oliver Blaber, 28, an engineer, of 163-54 Twenty-third Avenue, Whitestone, was sent to Flushing Hospital. He was suffering from multiple fragment wounds, an arm fracture and second and third degree burns. Mr. Blaber is tentatively scheduled to undergo operation this morning.

Five other employes who were treated for minor injuries and sent home were: Ronald Silverman, 24, engineer, 65-70 162d Street, Flushing; Joseph Cirillo, 40, technician, 40-09 Bell Boulevard, Bayside; Mrs. Nellie Zafft, 28, secretary, 209-10 Eighty-sixth Road, Queens Village; Clarence Keck, 60, mail clerk, 112-32 207th Street, Bellerose, and Robert Resnick, 26, engineer, 22 Lincoln Avenue, Glen Cove, L. I.

Curiosity Outweighs Fear

Scores of residents from the garden-apartment neighborhood of Bayside, their fears of radiation outweighed by their curiosity, gathered to stare outside the plant's fences.

There was little fire-fighting to do after the explosion, because a brief burst of flame died out quickly. In addition to the equipment that was destroyed, ten of the thirteen windows in the section were blown out.

The A. E. C. issued a statement last night declaring that the origin of the explosions appeared to have been in the handling of thorium, a radioactive element that has been used for many years in the manufacture of gas mantles and radio tube filaments.

Thorium was described as being of value in the atomic energy industry because of its potential use as "breeder material" in nuclear reactors. Thorium has the capacity, when burned with enriched uranium, to convert ordinary uranium into additional nuclear fuel.

The A. E. C. statement emphasized that the radioactivity of thorium was less than that of uranium and was less toxic. The A. E. C. team found from air samples taken within three hours of the explosion that the atmosphere showed considerably lower radioactivity than normally permitted for continuous occupational exposure.

The process being conducted by Sylvania at Bayside is an experimental laboratory operation, it was noted, and there are no nuclear reactors or large scale atomic machines in the Queens plant.

"There is no possibility that anyone could have taken in a measurable amount of thorium unless he was in the room when the blast occurred or entered it a few minutes after the explosion," the A. E. C. said. Clean-up operations were being carried out, the agency declared, without danger to plant personnel or the community.

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