

Citizens' Oversight Projects (COPs)

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PRESS RELEASE -- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CITIZENS' OVERSIGHT PROJECTS
CitizensOversight.org

Citizens Oversight Demands Full Investigation by California Coastal Commission into San Onofre Near-Miss Incident

Whistle-blower reported 104,000 lb, 5/8" thick nuclear waste container teetering over an 18 foot fall held by only 1/4 inch

Computer Model Tests Consider Drops of only 12 inches

SAN DIEGO (Aug 21, 2018) -- Citizens Oversight, Inc., the organization who sued the Coastal Commission and Southern California Edison to stop the nuclear waste dump on the beach, today announced that a letter has been sent to the California Coastal Commission (CCC) demanding a full investigation into the near-miss incident described by safety inspector and whistle-blower David Fritch at the Aug 9, 2018 Community Engagement Panel (CEP) meeting in Oceanside.

Fritch, an OSHA inspector who has been working on the San Onofre site where spent fuel is being moved to the underground spent fuel storage installation only 100 ft from the water's edge, said that the workers thought they had lowered the canister into the underground vault, only to find out that it had become lodged on a guide ring, which was about 18 feet up from the bottom of the vault, held there by a fraction of an inch.

Fritch's full remarks and the initial response to them at the meeting can be viewed at this link: <http://www.copswiki.org/Common/M1870> His transcribed comments are attached to the CCC letter.

Ray Lutz, engineer at Citizens Oversight said, "Edison says there was no risk because computer model testing shows that canisters can be dropped 25 feet without failing. However, those models were considering damage to canisters contained in much stronger Transportation or Transfer casks, and not the relatively thin, 5/8" thick stainless-steel interior canister alone. Computer models of the canister alone (inside the HI-STORM overpack) consider drops of only 12 inches.

"Intuition says that if the 104,000 lb, 5/8" thick stainless steel canister had fallen the 18 feet, it would have suffered substantial damage, the containment may have been breached, and it very likely would have become wedged in the bottom of the vault. With no circulating air cooling the radioactive waste, the fuel

would likely overheat. If the fuel assemblies inside were also compromised, there is a risk that a critical reaction would have been sustained. Worst-case, it could have resulted in a meltdown or explosive scenario, contaminating the coastal area for many miles. It is unclear how they could get the crumpled mess back out of the underground vault at that point.

"We disagree with David Lockbaum of the Union of Concerned Scientists who said these canisters have been modeled and were not compromised when dropped 30 feet in computer models. He is confusing computer models of the Transportation or Transfer Casks, which surround the interior canister, and in those models, the interior canister was considered a rigid cylinder which could not be damaged. I challenge Lochbaum to come up with substantiation for his off-hand remarks that bare canisters have been modeled and have no damage when dropped 18 feet."

The letter to the CCC includes references to the actual computer model tests which show that the canister was only dropped 12 inches, and documents regarding human factors engineering issues that listed many accident scenarios but did not consider this one.

"Basically, this is one of those 'Gee, we didn't think of that' moments for the nuclear industry," said Lutz. "It is important now that we pause and include this and similar scenarios in accident recovery plans. Unfortunately, they have no plans to deal with any compromised canisters at this point."

Fritch also listed a number of concerns regarding the dismal safety culture at the plant. He said they were under-trained, under-staffed, and did not communicate lessons learned to subsequent workers.

The letter to the CCC is attached to this press release. It and other references can be found at this web page: <http://www.copswiki.org/Common/M1870>

Ray Lutz is available for media interviews.

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