

United States Environmental Protection Agency
Region II
POLLUTION REPORT

Date: Saturday, February 21, 2009
From: Paul L. Kahn, Michael Hoppe

To: Andrew Raddant, Department of Interior Lisa Levy, OSHA
William Molnar, Sandy Alexander Albert Greco, City of Clifton
Denise Zeno, USEPA Angela Carpenter, USEPA

Subject: SPECIAL #9: Discovery of Potentially Shock-sensitive Chemicals
Abrachem Chemical
2 Peekay Drive, Clifton, NJ
Latitude: 40.8306000
Longitude: -74.1231000

POLREP No.:	21	Site #:	A212
Reporting Period:		D.O. #:	072
Start Date:	1/2/2009	Response Authority:	CERCLA
Mob Date:	12/30/2008	Response Type:	Time-Critical
Demob Date:		NPL Status:	Non NPL
Completion Date:		Incident Category:	Removal Action
CERCLIS ID #:	NJR000031831	Contract #	EP-W-04-055
RCRIS ID #:			

Site Description

At 1615 hours on 10/29/08 EPA received a notification from the NRC that a chemical release was occurring at Abrachem Chemical, a bulk chemical packaging facility that leased a building in Clifton, Passaic County, NJ. The NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection was on-scene and requested EPAs presence.

At 1730 hours OSC Ellen Banner and OSC Paul Kahn responded to the scene. The company was found to be storing drums and bulk containers of known and unknown chemicals in 17 56-foot long intermodal shipping carriers (ISCs), stacked 3 tiers high (approx. 35 feet). Only 5 of the ISCs could be opened, and inside those it was observed that drums and bulk containers were staged behind tiers of empty poly drums, giving the impression that the ISCs were used for new drum storage. EPA observed that in the one ISC where the release originated at least one drum was leaking its contents onto a wooden pallet; strong chemical odors emanated from the open door of the ISC and were also pervasive in the general area.

The Operator of Abrachem retained the services of a remediation company, and contractor personnel were advised to lay poly sheeting and begin removing and overpacking the leaking and unknown drums that were readily accessible. Work commenced almost immediately, but at 2100 hours was halted due to lack of adequate lighting and inability to physically access the majority of the drums through the narrow doorway.

The Operator of Abrachem and the Owner of the property was issued a Field Expedient Notice, and in response the Operator stated he would initiate a removal action. When his efforts to respond to the release, and threats of a release, proved to be inadequate EPA sought voluntary access to initiate a response action. This access was denied on two occasions. On 12/4/2008 EPA issued a Unilateral Administrative Order (UAO) for access. The Operator refused to comply with the UAO and EPA referred the matter to the Department of Justice for a legal remedy. On 1/8/2009 a federal Magistrate issued an access warrant to EPA to initiate a response action at the Site.

Current Activities

At approximately 1100 hours on Friday, February 20th, overpack drums were being opened for sampling. Three of the overpacks were observed to contain inner poly drums that had extensive deposits

of crystals on their outer surfaces, around the bung holes, and on the inner surfaces of the overpack drum. Alerted to the situation, OSCs notified the Clifton Fire Department (CFD), which notified the Passaic County Bomb Squad (PVBS). As officials entered the premises an acetylene odor began to seep into the Site command post. ERRS personnel informed the OSC that they had opened an overpack drum to take a sample of the inner contents and a grayish white smoke fumed from the drum. The release triggered the low oxygen alarm on an Area RAE and doors/windows were opened to ventilate the interior. The Site was then ordered evacuated by OSC Kahn. The Regional Response Center (RRC) in Edison was notified of the situation, as was the Public Affairs Division (PAD) in the Regional office. OSC Daly sent an e-mail to RPB management personnel, informing them of the situation. OSCs Daly and Kahn joined the CFD and other response officials in the CFD mobile command post and planned a response to both situations. The PVBS recommended that the drums of suspicious crystallized chemicals not be moved, and the ERRS contractor was directed to initiate subcontracting with a High Hazard remediation company.

Later in the afternoon, OSC Kahn and PAD staff discussed the situation and a draft press release was prepared for OSC review. The agree-upon draft was e-mailed to the CFD for review and a joint press release was issued by PAD later in the day. Subsequently, arrangements were made for OSC Kahn, reps from the CFD, the City of Clifton, the NJDEP, and other state agencies to meet with a rep from Clean Harbors (Baltimore, MD) the remediation subcontractor, at the Site at 1000 hours on Saturday to view the drums of crystallized chemicals and plan a response.

Planned Removal Actions

All parties met with Clean Harbors for a recon on Saturday, and it was determined that there are 5 suspicious drums in one staging area inside the Site, and a 6th drum in another staging area. ERRS will restage the waste drums in a 50 foot radius from the 6 suspicious drums and lay a sandbag berm around them. At 0800 hours on Monday, February 23rd, Clean Harbors personnel will use a remotely-controlled drum opener to remove the bung covers from all 6 drums and a sample will be taken. If a sample tests "positive" for peroxides Clean Harbors will neutralize the crystals and contents of the inner drum in-place. The resulting non-haz material can then be shipped for conventional disposal at a later date. During this event the CFD and other response agencies will lay foam lines and stand-by in the event of the initiation of a conflagration. Clifton OEM has a contingency plan in effect and the evacuation of local residents and businesses in predetermined radii from the Site will be enacted. CFD and Clifton OEM will notify Bergen County OEM of the situation and request that they monitor activities at the Site during the operation on Monday. The OSCs and RPB management made arrangements with ERT to mobilize a met station to the Site. ERT will provide real-time wind and other meteorological data to Clifton OEM in the event of fire requiring evacuation and/or notification to surrounding communities in Passaic and Bergen Counties. ERRS is sending two chemists and a Response Manager to the Site to augment the existing ERRS crew. OSCs Daly and Kahn will direct ERRS personnel and advise local response personnel as needed. PAD will provide a press relations specialist to assist local officials with news media that may be at the scene. OSC Kahn will inform the owner of the premises and asked to provide a rep to be on-site during the operation on Monday.

Additional emergency funds are being requested from ERRD management to cover the unexpected Site costs associated with this operation.

Next Steps

On Sunday, February 22nd, ERRS will restage drums away from the 6 suspicious drums and build a sandbag berm around the drums.

Key Issues

Key issue is obviously the safety of the nearest residents and businesses, as well as the surrounding communities in Passaic and Bergen Counties. Another key issue is the safety of all persons involved in this inherently dangerous operation.

response.epa.gov/abrachemchemical