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NRC RELEASES PREVIOUSLY CONTAMINATED SITE IN OHIO
FOR UNRESTRICTED USE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has released a site owned by the Elkem Metals Company near Marietta, Ohio, for unrestricted use following cleanup of radioactive contamination to safe levels.

The former owner of the site, the Union Carbide Company, attempted to extract tantalum and columbium (non-radioactive metals) from the soil beginning in 1955. The work was performed under a license from the former Atomic Energy Commission. The raw material for the process was tin slag, imported from Thailand, which contained the radioactive elements thorium and uranium. Operations at the facility ceased in 1970.

The facility was sold to the Elkem Metals Company in 1981 which used it to produce chromium and manganese alloys. A separate facility on site, which also produces manganese electrodes for dry cell batteries, was sold to Ralston Purina in 1986.

In the early 1980s, Union Carbide began cleaning up the facility to reduce radioactive contaminants. About 9,000 cubic meters of soil were transported to a processing facility owned by Union Carbide in Uravan, Colorado. After an NRC site review, the agency declared the decontamination successful. But in 1992 an Elkem employee found additional contamination at the site, and a subsequent survey indicated that levels of radioactivity exceeded safety limits in certain areas. The site was then added to the NRC's Site Decommissioning Management Plan, which identifies about 34 sites around the country that are contaminated with radioactive materials and warrant special attention to ensure proper cleanup.

After initial remediation was completed in December 1994, contaminated materials were stored on site in steel containers. In 1997, arrangements were made with the State of Colorado to transfer these materials to the Union Carbide uranium mill, also in Uravan.

Final surveys by Elkem and Union Carbide were followed up with confirmatory surveys by the NRC and the Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education between 1995 and 1998. NRC and the Oak Ridge organization also conducted a series of inspections before releasing the site for unrestricted use.

The site covers an area of approximately three acres, where contamination was located in one building, and on soil, concrete pads and equipment, and in two smaller buildings.

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