

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 2010-11
20 October 2010

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: AUSTRALIAN NUCLEAR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATION

TOPIC: Yttrium-90 event

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 20 October 2010, E10)

QUESTION No.: SI-6

Senator LUDLAM—I will ask for some more detailed information to be taken on notice on yttrium-90 incident on 3 September 2007 that I was speaking about before. Maybe we will pursue some of this stuff in a private briefing but I might get you to take some material on notice. In relation to the data from the contamination monitors at the barrier and personal dosimeters worn by the staff who were involved in those incidents, I am interested to know what happened to that data—whether that material still exists or whether it disappears.

Mr McIntosh—To clarify: this is not the incident you were referring to in your earlier questions.

Senator LUDLAM—Yes.

Mr McIntosh—This is the incident from September 2007, which was the subject of the ARPANSA report that we provided to you a couple of weeks ago.

Senator LUDLAM—That is right. Thanks, Mr McIntosh, that is the case. From the time line that has been provided, there seems to be some confusion as to whether Mr Reid, whom we have spoken about in relation to the ‘moly’ 99 incident, was actually on site at the time. ANSTO have stated that he could not have witnessed the event because he was not on site at the time. The time line itself contradicts this. That is an issue that I would not mind stepping through with you at some length. But if there is any way you can clear up that confusion, I would appreciate it because at the moment the time line—

Dr Storr—To clarify one point: the time line does indeed show that when the event was recorded it was monitored in the afternoon, and Mr Reid was not on site.

Senator LUDLAM—When the event was recorded he was not on site. What I am talking about is when the contamination incident occurred. That was probably before 9 am when Mr Reid was on site. When it was reported and logged was later in the day. I think it was in the early afternoon after Mr Reid had gone.

Dr Storr—No. We are certain of the time when the event was recorded. It is not possible to determine at this stage when the event actually occurred.

Senator LUDLAM—We know it was before 9 am because that was when he was working with the beta-emitter. He was working with yttrium-90 before nine o’clock in the morning, which is in your time lines. I am just relying on your records for that.

Dr Storr—No, that is an assertion that has been made by the AMWU and we have to take that back and have a look at that. This was the subject of a letter which came to us late last night.

Senator LUDLAM—I guess that is what I am asking you to do. We are out of time now, but that particular chain of events is worth pursuing.

ANSWER

Based on the detailed timeline of events and related information, it is possible that Mr Reid briefly saw operator one (the operator who was contaminated at 13:24 and subsequently at 14:44) in the change-room area on the morning of 3 September 2007. However, no personal contamination events were recorded for that morning or indeed until 13:24.

The monitoring equipment was functional and operator one was fully familiar with the barrier requirements to undertake personal contamination monitoring. If operator one had been contaminated, the alarms would have sounded. In addition, there would have been no incentive for the operator to disguise any event. The scenario that a serious contamination event was known but not reported that morning – would in fact suggest serious breaches of safety culture by at least three staff members, including Mr Reid.

From ANSTO's records, Mr Reid explicitly claims that he witnesses another staff member being in the change-room at the same time in the morning as operator one and that operator one and another staff member were contaminated (operator two).

The first personal contamination event was discovered at 13:24, some 35 minutes after Mr Reid had left the production area. This event involved detection of contamination during routine personal monitoring as Operator Two was exiting the production facility and Operator One was changing clothing prior to undertaking production operations within the clean-room. From ANSTO's records and the report by the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA), Mr Reid could not have been a witness to this afternoon event at this time, as he had left the production area.

Subsequently, at 14:44 operator one identified personal contamination (the second incident of the day) during routine personal monitoring within the change room area. As acknowledged by all involved, Mr Reid had left the Lucas Height's site sometime earlier.

The timeline described above is fully supported by the inspection report produced by ARPANSA. The findings in all cases have been consistent with ANSTO's own findings.

Based on the records and transcripts in ANSTO's possession and from ARPANSA's independent investigation, ANSTO concludes that Mr Reid did not witness these events first-hand.