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**The Marcoule Accident : the
figures given concerning the
radioactivity of wastes at the
Centraco plant were
erroneous, and probably
deliberate lies.**

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*** This French NGO is noted for its independent reports on contamination from Chernobyl etc. The name means Commission for Independent Research and Information on Radioactivity.**

In nuclear matters, the dossiers keep changing yet the same conclusions can be drawn: the companies involved underestimate the risks, and the official experts show a lack of critical thinking, even a certain complacency.

On 23 September, the CRIIRAD contacted the authorities in charge of radioprotection and nuclear security, the ASN (Nuclear Security Authorities) and the ministries of health, industry and ecology. It denounced the secrecy shrouding the key elements of the dossier, and the publication by the IRSN (Institute of Radioprotection and Nuclear Security) of an astoundingly low figure (63 000 Bq) for the activity of 4 tonnes of metallic wastes present in the furnace at the time of the explosion. The CRIIRAD considered this figure "absolutely incompatible" with the dose rate of 8,5 _Sv/h reportedly measured in the body of the explosion victim, José MARIN. Since the information on the dose came from an unofficial source, the CRIIRAD had not gone further than asking questions and seeking clarification.

On 28 September, from the website of Le Dauphiné Libéré, the CRIIRAD learnt of the declarations of the Procureur in charge of inquiries, M. Robert GELLI, declarations which confirmed the dose findings. The CRIIRAD therefore sent an official letter to the Procureur de la République (a high-level attorney), emphasizing that it is "impossible to measure such a high dose rate if the contamination comes from metallic wastes as weakly contaminated as the operator and the IRSN claim them to be", and calling on the inquiries office to carry out dosimetric cartography and laboratory analyses in order to establish the real activity of the 4 tonnes of radioactive wastes.

[The operator, known as SOCODEI (Société pour le conditionnement des déchets et des effluents industriels) is a subsidiary of EDF, specialising in conversion of waste, notably scrap metals.]

Below is the letter sent by the CRIIRAD on 29/09/11

The CRIIRAD has just become aware of the information published by the ASN yesterday on its website, which indicates that the "the fusion contained, at the moment of the accident, a load of about 4 tonnes of waste for an activity of 30 MBq and not 63 KBq as the operator at first announced". This new figure is 476 times higher than the one that had been circulating since 12 September.

THIS INFORMATION PROMPTS SOME VERY SERIOUS QUESTIONS :

1. Would it have been published in the CRIIRAD had not contacted the different authorities on 23 September officially, by registered letter?
2. How come the state's expert body, the IRSN (Institut de Radioprotection et de Sûreté Nucléaire), which was present onsite and has far greater resources than the CRIIRAD, accepted without reservation the suspect figure given by the operator. The figure of 63 KBq was being published from 12 September by the IRSN without any subsequent correction.

Cf. Press Release of 30 September 2011 ACCIDENT CENTRACO

3. What credibility can we give to the operator's self-monitoring, which is an essential aspect of the Centraco plant? From 63 kBq to 30 MBq, the discrepancy is not 10 or 20% but nearly 500 times! And it is highly improbable that this was a mere unlucky set of circumstances, that the explosion involved the operator's only set of ill-measured wastes. Remember that the CRIIRAD has studied the original project for the Centraco plant and that one of its chief criticisms concerned specifically the lack of a reliable system for monitoring the activity of wastes.

We are also entitled to wonder whether the Centraco plant is not operating in complete breach of the rules prescribed for its operation: breach of the authorisation decree that limits the total activity it may hold; and breach of the ceilings for radioactive and chemical pollutants discharged into the atmosphere and the Rhone river. If the real discharges are 10 times or 100 times greater than those declared, the limits for discharge of tritium (for example) or alpha emitters would certainly be exceeded.

In all these cases, the inquiries office will have to determine whether the underestimation of the activity of waste is due to a deliberate action by the operator or a failure to master the radioactive substances it deals with. Whichever explanation is the correct one, this is very worrying.

In order to access all parts of the dossier, the management of the CRIIRAD have decided to place a DEPOT D'UNE PLAINTE EN JUSTICE (formal legal complaint) on the agenda of the organisation's next administration council meeting, scheduled for 14 October next.

The objective is to make sure that all responsibilities are well researched and well established. The explosion caused the death of an employee, and another is in a critical condition. Full light must be shed on the plant's operating conditions and monitoring systems.

Valence, 29 September 2011

From CRIIRAD

- ▶ 471 Avenue Victor Hugo
- ▶ 26000 VALENCE
- ▶ contact@criirad.org

Sent to Monsieur Robert GELLI

- ▶ Procureur de la République
- ▶ Nouveau Palais de Justice
- ▶ Boulevard des Arènes
- ▶ 30000 NIMES

Subject : CENTRACO accident on 12/09/2011

Monsieur le Procureur,

Please find enclosed a copy of our letter sent on 23 September to the authorities in charge of nuclear safety and radioprotection (**footnote 1**). It concerns the explosion that occurred on 12 September at the fusion unit for metallic radioactive wastes in the Centraco plant.

We wish thus to obtain access to the data which the authorities and their expert, the IRSN, relied on when they publicised on the day of the explosion categorical information on the absence of discharges in to the atmosphere, on the very weak activity of the radioactive metallic wastes in the fusion process and on the absence of environmental contamination.

Our analysis of the dossier reveals important zones of shadow, along with some declarations that are improbable, even totally incoherent.

We hope that some of the questions we ask can be addressed in the framework of the inquiry you are in charge of.

We draw your attention particularly to the passage concerning the activity of the 4 tonnes of metal present in the furnace at the moment of the explosions. In its statement of 12 September 2011 (1900h), the IRSN declares that the activity of the approx. 4 tonnes of metallic wastes present was only 63 000 Bq. **(footnote 2)**

This figure is presented first as coming from the operator (footnote 3), and then is taken up without reservation by the IRSN: « *It should be noted that the activity inside the furnace was low (63 kBq) and that the radiological consequences that could have resulted from the discharge of all this activity would have been extremely small and probably not identifiable by measuring devices in the area.* »

As you can see by reading our correspondence with the authorities, we are astonished by a figure that is so low and so precise, and we request access to all the available analysis data for the radiological characterisation of the source. We indicate that this clarification is particularly needed because we have just learnt of something that a websurfer put on the « Rue89 » blogsite - he presented himself as a member of the gendarmerie unit that attended the Centraco site and he stated that the value given by a dose measure made by "pseudo-contact" with the victim's body was 8,5 _Sv/h.

That information was confirmed yesterday: an article published on the site of Le Dauphiné Libéré -^Â
www.ledauphine.com echoes your declarations about the particular kind of coffin used for the body of the deceased operator, M. José Marin : « *The measures showed a very low level of radioactivity. The measures revealed 8,5 microsieverts at the level of the feet*».

We can then accept as true that the victim's body was contaminated and that the dose level was 8,5 _Sv/h on part of his body, which is 50 to 100 times the expected natural background radiation. It seems impossible to measure so high a dose if the contamination comes from metallic wastes as weakly contaminated as is claimed by the operator and the IRSN.

A total activity of 63 kBq for 4 tonnes of waste corresponds to an average mass activity of between 15 and 16 Bq/kg. Admittedly, the contamination was probably not spread homogeneously through the metallic elements, but in order to measure 8,5 _Sv/h the totality of the 63 000 Bq would have to have been concentrated in less than 1%, or even less than 0,1% of the total mass and those few kilograms would have to be the precise ones projected onto the victim's feet! This totally improbable configuration would still not be enough to account for a dose of 8,5 _Sv/h : it would also be necessary to verify the nature of the beta/gamma emitting radionuclides responsible (a piece of information so far kept secret), the mass and mix of contaminated metals, and the results of the different measures taken on the victim's body.

In order to deal with these questions, it is indispensable to do a thorough cartography of the dose rate on the entire quantity of molten metal, and to take sufficient representative samples for lab analysis (complete analysis, not just beta/gamma emitters). This data will make it possible to evaluate the real activity of the 4 tonnes of waste and to

verify whether these results are compatible with the figure published by the IRSN and the documents that the SOCODEI was obliged to produce - which have to give account of the monitoring done on the wastes before the fusion operations. These investigations must absolutely be integrated into the inquiry that you are in charge of.

We stand available to discuss all aspects of this matter with you, Monsieur le Procureur,

Yours sincerely,

For the CRIIRAD, the director

Corinne CASTANIER

PS:

1 The Autorité de Sûreté Nucléaire, and the ministers in charge of Health, Ecologie and Industry.

2 IRSN : Situation of the CENTRACO plant located at Marcoule (Rhône valley, Gard) - 7pm - information note n°2 du 12/09/2011.

3 « At the moment of the explosion, the furnace contained, according to SOCODEI, 4 tonnes metallic wastes of very low activity (TFA) presenting a total activity of 63 kBq of radionuclides emitting beta and gamma particles. »