



UNECE Weekly

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Issue N° 177 – 19-23 June 2006

Monitoring Radioactive Scrap Metal

What do your watch, a smoke detector and a piece of metal from a nuclear facility all have in common? The answer is that they may all three trigger an alarm should they go through a radioactivity detector. In a world where we are encouraged to recycle more, the metal industry is a success story with over 50% of their supplies coming from recycled material.

Yet recycling can come at a high cost in this sector, as a number of workers and scrap yards have found.

If the recycled metal scraps are not well monitored, radioactive sources – be they for example, from smoke detectors, contaminated pipes, medical apparatus,



Radioactive chemical tank

or nuclear facilities – can be melted as the metal is recycled and contaminate means of transport, scrap yards and entire steel mills. Such incidents may not only have serious consequences for the environment and public health, particularly for people working at such installations, but also result frequently in the closure and clean-up of steel facilities, not to mention the loss of trust in the use of recycled materials.

To avoid major incidents, industries and regulatory bodies will need to spend often very large amounts of money to isolate the radioactive metal sources and determine what to do with them depending on the amount of radioactivity involved. In addition, metal scrap is a major commodity that is traded internationally and transported over

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large distances across the globe. As it crosses borders, it is subject to widely different procedures to check for and deal with any signs of radioactivity.

In seeking to proactively address this cross-sectoral issue UNECE, as part of its work on the transport of dangerous goods, border crossing and trade facilitation, hosted on 12-14 June an Expert Group Meeting on Monitoring Radioactive Scrap Metal to agree on "Recommendations on Monitoring and Response Procedures for Radioactive Scrap Metal". These recommendations are based on national and international regulations and industry standards and describe good practices to effectively prevent, detect and respond to radioactive scrap metal. They will encourage further cooperation, coordination and harmonization at national and international levels.

The meeting brought together experts from 26 countries, including also countries outside the UNECE region, such as Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Republic of Korea and South Africa. It also gathered representatives from the European Commission, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the metal and recycling industries. The recommendations will now be finalized by the UNECE secretariat and made widely available. ❖

For more information see: <http://www.unece.org/trans/radiation/radiation.html>

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