

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2051/98
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to the Commission

Subject: Radioactive gas emission from the Acerinox factory, Cadiz, Spain

On 9 June 1998 the Acerinox steel factory informed the Spanish Council for Nuclear Security that radioactive gas had escaped from one of its melting furnaces, although radioactive contamination had already been detected in the smoke filtering system on 2 June. The apparent origin of the contamination was the presence of radioactive waste containing Cesium-137 in the scrap iron feeding the melting furnaces of the factory. Surprisingly, local authorities and public opinion were not informed until 12 June. The radioactive contamination has not only affected the surrounding area, but also other countries, including France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany, where an unusually high level of Cesium-137 had been detected by their national nuclear authorities and by the International Atomic Energy Agency since 25 May 1998!

In fact, the contaminated melting furnace had been kept working several days after the event and contaminated steel, ash and other remnants have been produced. This ash and these remnants may have been dumped at the site of El Cobre, Algeciras, where ash from this factory is normally dumped. This site is not suitable for receiving radioactive materials. Moreover, no emergency plan was put into action after the accident in the factory. The environmental organization Agaden has sent a claim to the Commission concerning this event on 14 June 1998.

Does the Acerinox factory receive financial aid from the European Union? If so, will this aid be suspended until it has been established who is responsible and environmental measures have been taken? Does the Commission intend to investigate whether the Spanish authorities have failed in applying those EU Directives preventing damage to the environment as well as on human health, for instance the EIA Directive 85/337/EEC¹ and the basic radiation standards Directive 84/467/Euratom?

Could this kind of contamination result from smelting radioactive materials permitted under the exemptions in the basic radiation standards Directive?

What measures have been taken to coordinate international action on this case of cross-border radioactive pollution?

¹ OJ L 175, 5.7.1985, p. 40.