

Agent Blasting Type E (Class 1.5D)

Second Shipping Campaign

Briefing Paper

Issue:

Safety of communities during the temporary in-transit storage of Agent Blasting Type E (Class 1.5D) in Oregon and Washington.

Background:

Over the last 5 years, Nelson Brothers of Rosette, Wyoming has shipped by highway, rail, and water several million pounds of a blasting agent emulsion to the Red Dog Mine near Cominco, Alaska. During the next several months, the company expects to ship approximately 106 IM-102 portable tanks¹ (46,000 pounds each) to Alaska.

In previous years, staging of the shipments from Nelson Brothers to the Red Dog mine occurred in Alaska. Shipments to the Red Dog Mine occurred in 4 and 5 portable tank container shipments. This year, however, the staging operations occurred in the Ports of Portland and Seattle, where staging allowed up to 51 portable tanks to accumulate.

The Red Dog zinc-lead mine is in northwest Alaska, about 145 kilometers north of Kotzebue. The property is owned by the NANA Regional Corporation and leased to Cominco Alaska Incorporated, a wholly owned subsidiary. NANA is a corporation organized under the provisions of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Under the lease agreement, Cominco Alaska owns and operates the facilities and NANA receives an annual royalty payment. Annual production of zinc, lead and bulk concentrates is trucked 84 kilometers from the mine to the port site on the Chukchi Sea, and stored until the three-month summer shipping season when the sea is ice-free.

Zinc is an anti-corrosive galvanizing agent for steel used in items ranging from nails and pipes to automobile bodies and bridge girders. Zinc compounds also are fed to animals as a mineral supplement and applied to fields as a trace element to aid plant growth. Most flashlight batteries contain zinc as a major component, and all tires manufactured in the Western World contain approximately a third of a pound of zinc oxide. Every "copper" penny struck since 1983 contains 97.6 percent zinc and just 2.4 percent copper.

¹ These shipments are operating under a DOT-Exemption 8723, issued by the Research and Special Programs Administration, Department of Transportation. The exemption authorizes the transport of the product in IM 102 portable tanks.

Routing Issues:

Norwest International, LLC (Northwest) plans to ship 4.6 million pounds of a blasting agent, described as Agent Blasting, Type E, from the production facility of Nelson Brothers Company, Gillette, Wyoming, to the Red Dog Mine in Cominco, Alaska.²

The route

The route of the shipment is from Gillette, Wyoming, by highway, to Rozet, Wyoming. At Rozet, a trans-load operation would transfer the product from highway to rail in IM 102 portable tanks (loading on a railroad flatcar). The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF), the originating rail carrier, would then transport the tanks from Rozet to the West Coast. At the West Coast, these shipments are transferred from rail back to highway and moved to a staging area for transfer from land to water barge operations. At the barge operations, Alaska Marine Lines would transport the tanks to Alaska towards the Red Dog Mine.

September 13, 2001

Currently, the United States Coast Guard and the local authorities, including the Swinomish Tribe (La Conner, Washington) are negotiating an acceptable land-water transfer location. Possible locations include, La Conner, Washington, the Port of Astoria, Oregon at North Tongue Point and the Bellingham Bay Shipping Building in Bellingham, Washington.

There are 27 IM 102s loaded with Class 1.5 Blasting Agents at the staging area near Stanwood, Washington, a 40-acre site in a remote location.

All movements are off of the rail. There are two empty containers in Denver, ten empty containers in Kansas City, and six empty containers in Rozet, Wyoming. Four of the containers at Rozet will be loaded and moved by highway to the barge operations on the West Coast.

Senior DOT officials met today, including Richard Biter (OST), Allan Rutter, Mark Lindsey, Francisco Gonzalez (FRA), Julie Cirillio, William Quade, and Charles Horan (FMCSA), Emmanuel Pfersich (USCG), Fritz Wybenga and Del Billings (RSPA), and Tom Sherman (S-3) to discuss this issue. The group agreed to make a recommendation to the Secretary of Transportation to order the movement of these containers to port for loading and transportation to the Red Dog Mine. The Secretary is expected to conference with USCG and other authorities today to announce his decision.

² According to RSPA's file (DHM-31), Nelson Brothers, Incorporated holds approval EX-9403054 for a product identified as PowerNel 3000 as UN 0332, Explosive, blasting, type E, 1.5D. The product contains ammonium nitrate, fuel, water, and microspheres. Approval of this product, as UN 0332, was based on a Bureau of Mines, US Department of the Interior, recommendation issued on March 10, 1994 (Report No.T-8590).