



A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO NUCLEAR EMERGENCY RESPONSE- A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The effective management of radiation emergencies is essential to safeguard the health and safety of both emergency responders and the surrounding public. The study emphasizes the critical importance of a systematic approach to radiation incidents, focusing on obtaining appropriate safety equipment, conducting thorough radiation detection, and ensuring that the affected area is cleared of any radioactive threats before public access is allowed. Radiation incidents can occur unexpectedly and pose serious risks if not swiftly and adequately addressed. The failure to properly manage these emergencies could lead to harmful radiation exposure, resulting in long-term health consequences. This study contributes valuable insights by evaluating how the systematic procedures currently in place such as identifying radioactive sources, preventing exposure, and decontaminating affected areas can be optimized. A key aspect of this research is its exploration of safety protocols, personnel training, and communication strategies to ensure that all parties, including the Radiation Protection Officer (RPO), assistants, and relevant authorities, work cohesively to mitigate risks. By assessing previous radiation emergencies, interviewing experienced responders, and analyzing safety protocols, the study aims to highlight areas for improvement, ensuring that future responses are more efficient and effective. The findings are expected to provide actionable recommendations that will enhance radiation safety standards, contribute to faster emergency response times, and reduce the likelihood of harm to both responders and the public. As radiation emergencies continue to pose a significant threat, future studies should focus on advancing radiation detection technologies, refining training programs for emergency personnel, and enhancing decontamination techniques. Furthermore, improving coordination between various agencies and incorporating real-time data collection in radiation monitoring can contribute to more proactive management of such incidents. Ultimately, optimizing emergency response strategies will significantly improve the safety, well-being, and security of both the response teams and the general public during radiation-related emergencies.

Key words: Nuclear emergency, emergency response, radiation protection, radiation, ionizing radiation

Introduction

Generally, there are three categories, which are (i) local emergency, (ii) site emergency, and (iii) off-premise emergency [1]. A local

emergency refers to an accident or emergency that is confined to a specific location or area only. It usually does not pose a significant threat to a wider area or a larger scale. It can be managed by the Radiation Protection Officer (RPO) with assistance from other workers/staff. A site emergency involves a larger area and can encompass the entire worksite and related facilities. It has the

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potential to spread and lead to a more significant emergency if not controlled properly. An off-premise emergency occurs when an accident happens within a worksite or premises, causing radioactive materials to escape beyond the boundaries of the premises. The accident could lead to radiation exposure to workers, excessive exposure to the public, and the environment.

A good emergency plan should include an emergency organization, communication with the Department of Atomic Energy and relevant public authorities such as the police, fire department, emergency classification, actions to be taken during the emergency, actions to be taken after the emergency, intervention levels, and a list of emergency equipment. Accidents or emergencies occur suddenly and can cause panic and confusion. Emergency preparedness must take into account the need for effective communication to direct workers on actions for self-rescue. The actions include rescue efforts and information gathering by the radiation protection squad. Lastly, external assistance should be sought [2]. Ongoing training and emergency drills should be conducted periodically to ensure better preparedness for real emergencies. In the event of an accident, the license holder must notify the Department of Atomic Energy within 24 hours. An investigation must be conducted, and immediate remedial actions taken. A written report must be submitted to the Department of Atomic Energy within 30 days.

The report details should include information such as the license holder's details, the date, time, and location of the emergency, the type, quantity, chemical/physical form of the radioactive materials or radiation apparatus involved, results of radiation dose assessment for workers and how it was received, results of environmental dose assessment (if applicable), actions taken to control the accident, steps taken to prevent a recurrence

of the same incident, and any other relevant information deemed necessary [3].

Radioactive contamination refers to radioactive material on the surface or within solids, liquids, or gases (including the human body), where their presence is unintended or undesired, or the process that releases them in such places. Radioactive contamination is usually the result of (i) spills or accidents during the production or use of radioactive materials (ii) nuclear fallout, which is the spread of radioactive contamination due to a nuclear explosion but is rare. While decontamination is the removal of radioactive contamination present on surfaces (areas/individuals/objects) or that has spread throughout the work area [4]. The steps to be taken depend on the extent of the spill and the type of radioactive material spilled. The actions are divided into three categories: (i) spills without contamination to personnel, (ii) spills involving contamination and exposure to personnel, and (iii) accidents involving radioactive dust, vapors, fumes, organic vapors, and gases.

In the event of a spill without work area contamination, the following steps should be taken. First, immediately inform all workers on duty at the spill site and isolate the affected area, ensuring it is clearly labeled. To prevent the spill from spreading, absorbent materials should be used for liquid spills, and gloves must be worn. For solid spills, dampen all affected areas to prevent further spread, again ensuring gloves are worn. The Radiation Protection Officer (RPO) must be notified immediately. It is also essential to monitor all workers involved in the spill and decontamination process. The spill site, including the floor or area, should be decontaminated as directed by the RPO. Any contaminated items should be placed in designated containers and properly labeled. Contamination checks should be performed on workers and items leaving the spill area. Furthermore, no workers are allowed to re-

enter the spill area until it is confirmed that no radioactive contamination remains. Finally, a detailed spill accident report must be prepared.

For workers who are affected by a spill, the following steps must be taken. First, perform decontamination on the affected worker. Then, monitor the worker both before and after the decontamination process to ensure the effectiveness of the procedures. Finally, prepare a report regarding the incident, detailing the spill and the worker's contamination.

In the case of a radioactive dust accident, the following actions should be taken. First, immediately inform all occupants of the room to evacuate. Avoid inhaling contaminated air while exiting the area. Shut off the air conditioning and ensure all doors and windows are tightly closed, while placing warning signs [5]. The Radiation Protection Officer (RPO) is responsible for assessing the level of airborne contamination and attempting to rectify the situation.

Decontamination should be performed in any area suspected of contamination. Additionally, monitoring and examination of workers who may have been exposed to the contamination must be conducted. Lastly, a report should be prepared covering both the contamination of the area and the workers involved.

The radiation dose limitation system for radiation protection is based on three fundamental principles, which are (i) justification of practices, (ii) dose optimization, and (iii) dose limitation. Justification refers to any practice involving radiation that should not be carried out unless it provides benefits that outweigh the risks, if no other technique can be used except radiation-based techniques, or if radiation techniques are superior to alternative methods [6]. While dose optimization is defined as Radiation exposure must be kept as low as reasonably achievable (ALARA). The concept of ALARA and dose optimization are essentially the same.

Table 1: Dose limits for radiation workers

No.	Body Part	Dose Limit (mSv) in a calendar year
1	Whole body (effective dose)	20
2	Eye lens (equivalent dose)	150
3	Skin (equivalent dose)	500
4	Hands and feet (equivalent dose)	500
5	Fetus	1

Table 2: Dose Limits for the General Public

No.	Body Part	Dose Limit (mSv) in a calendar year
1	Whole body (effective dose)	1
2	Eye lens (equivalent dose)	15
3	Skin (equivalent dose)	50
4	A person assisting a patient during diagnostic examination or treatment (effective dose)	5
5	A person under 16 years old visiting a patient undergoing diagnostic examination or treatment involving radioactive materials (effective dose)	1



Case study

A worker handling radioactive materials was transporting two radioactive sources, Strontium-90 (Sr-90) and Cesium-137 (Cs-137), to be delivered to a radioactive storage building. During transit, an accident occurred where the container carrying the radioactive sources was ejected from the trolley onto the road. The worker, immediately reported the incident to the company's supervisor. Upon receiving the report, the company's Radiation Protection Officer (RPO), was dispatched to the scene to investigate the situation and take further action. At the scene, RPO was assisted by two of his assistants, who were assigned the responsibility of handling the situation properly. The steps expected to be taken by the investigation team are as follows:

(i) Obtain Necessary Safety Equipment

Before taking any action, the team must obtain the necessary safety equipment to ensure their safety and that of the public in the surrounding area. This includes protective gear, radiation detection equipment, as well as personal protective equipment such as specialized clothing and air filtration devices.

(ii) Conduct Radiation Detection Work

RPO and his assistants need to carry out radiation detection in the affected area to identify the location of the radioactive sources. This detection must be done carefully and according to the established procedures to ensure there is no harmful radiation exposure to the investigation team or the public nearby.

(iii) Ensure the Area is Safe Before Leaving

Before leaving the scene, the investigation team must ensure that the affected area has been cleared and is deemed safe from any radiation threats. They need to confirm that no radioactive material has been left behind and

that the area no longer poses a risk to the public. With prompt and efficient action from the company, the RPO, and the assistants, it is expected that the incident will be resolved safely and without exposing the public to any harm from radiation.

Materials

Tongs with various sizes, rope, decontamination kit, dosimeter pen, laboratory coat, radiation labels/signage, survey meter for measuring dose and contamination, radiation labels and stickers with various sizes, disposable and rubber gloves, tape, goggles, mask, storage container, shoes, tissues, head covers and plastic bags with various sizes.

Methodology

Survey Meter

Ensure the validity of the calibration certificate. If the battery function test is expired, send it to the certified company for recalibration. Turn on the survey meter and allow it to stabilize for a few minutes. Test the battery function and ensure the battery reaches the allowed level. Turn on the "audible" signal or "alarm." Ensure the survey meter is working properly by using a radioactive test source, and the readings should match the expected values (taking into account the half-life). Obtain the background reading. Move the survey meter to the work area to be measured. For survey meters with multiple ranges, start with the highest range and adjust to a lower range until the meter records an appropriate reading. Subtract the background reading to obtain the net reading. Evaluate the measurement results. Multiply the survey meter reading by the appropriate calibration factor (CF) as listed on the calibration certificate, if necessary. Record the measurement results. Ensure the measurement

results are reasonable compared to previous measurements. Lastly, record the conclusion.

Barricading and using personal protective clothing

In a nuclear emergency, personal protective clothing (PPE) plays a crucial role in safeguarding personnel from radiation exposure. The required PPE includes a full-body protective suit, such as Tyvek, to shield the body from contamination, along with rubber or nitrile gloves and boots to protect the hands and feet. Respirators or masks, such as N95 or full-face masks, should be worn to prevent inhalation of radioactive particles, while eye protection, like goggles or face shields, is essential to shield the eyes from potential contaminants. Additionally, radiation dosimeters must be worn to continuously monitor exposure levels.

Along with proper PPE, effective barricading is necessary to control access to the contaminated area. This involves isolating the affected zone with barriers and clear signage, ensuring that unauthorized personnel are kept out. Continuous radiation monitoring is required to assess and track contamination levels, and all actions must be documented for safety and accountability [7]. By following these procedures for both PPE usage and barricading, personnel and the public can be protected from radiation exposure, minimizing the risk of contamination and ensuring a safer environment during a nuclear emergency.

The methodology followed a systematic approach including site assessment, radiation detection, decontamination, and post-incident verification. Limitations of this study include reliance on simulated dose data and assumptions regarding personnel movement, which may differ under real-world emergency conditions.

These procedures are consistent with international guidelines provided by the IAEA, with slight variations in response time

and protective measures due to local regulatory requirements, highlighting both the robustness and adaptability of the national framework. While Malaysia's regulations are broadly aligned with IAEA guidance, for instance, through the Basic Safety Radiation Protection Regulations 2010 and the LEM/TEK guidelines, there are some practical and structural differences. Malaysia's system relies heavily on national legislation (Act 304) and inter-agency coordination via Directive No. 20, which embeds radiological emergencies within the broader national disaster management doctrine. Moreover, although the LEM/TEK 66 guideline mandates the testing of radiological emergency plans, recent legislative evolution (e.g., the 2025 proposed amendment to Act 304) suggests a shift toward more formalized and enforced requirements, likely to bring national practice even closer to IAEA standards.

Result and Discussion

(i) Obtain Necessary Safety Equipment

In essence, before taking any action during a radiation-related emergency, ensuring that the team is properly equipped with the necessary safety gear and radiation detection equipment is vital. This proactive approach allows the team to respond effectively while minimizing health risks, protecting themselves, and safeguarding the surrounding public. Only after ensuring that proper protective measures are in place should the team proceed with actions to contain, mitigate, or resolve the emergency.

Protective gear is designed to shield individuals from exposure to harmful substances, including radiation. It typically includes items (i) radiation shielding suits: these are made of special materials that reduce the penetration of radiation, ensuring responders remain safe while they assess or contain the emergency, (ii) gloves and boots: to prevent radioactive particles from coming

into direct contact with skin, gloves and boots with impermeable layers are crucial, (iii) helmets with face shields: these offer head protection against falling debris or exposure contamination [8].

to airborne radioactive particles. Face shields protect the eyes and face from potential radiation



Figure 1: (a) The PPE equipment and (b) the radioactive container

Radiation detection equipment is indispensable in identifying the presence, type, and level of radiation at the incident site. This equipment includes (i) geiger counters: these are handheld devices used to detect and measure ionizing radiation such as alpha, beta, and gamma radiation (ii) dosimeters: Worn by responders, dosimeters measure the cumulative dose of radiation they are exposed to over time, helping to ensure exposure levels remain within safe limits, (iii) radiation survey meters: used to measure radiation levels across the emergency site, helping to pinpoint areas of higher risk and to plan response strategies.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is necessary for individual safety, particularly in environments where exposure to hazardous materials like radioactive substances can occur. Key PPE items include (i) specialized clothing: these garments are designed to resist contamination and are typically made of impermeable materials to prevent radioactive particles from adhering to skin or clothing. For example, full-body suits (often called "bunny suits") might be worn to prevent contamination, (ii) air filtration devices: these devices, such as respirators or gas masks, filter out radioactive particles from the air.

They are essential in environments where airborne contamination is possible, helping protect the respiratory system of responders. In extreme cases, full-face respirators with powered air-purifying filters may be required.

Beyond the safety of the team, these protective measures also play a crucial role in preventing radiation exposure to the public. Radiation can spread quickly, especially in the case of airborne contamination, and protective equipment helps minimize the risks of contamination to people in the vicinity. In addition, emergency response teams equipped with radiation detection tools can assist in identifying contaminated zones and creating exclusion or evacuation zones to further safeguard public health [9].

(ii) Conduct Radiation Detection Work

The Radiation Protection Officer (RPO) is the designated expert responsible for overseeing radiation safety and ensuring compliance with safety protocols in environments where radiation hazards exist [10]. The RPO's role includes supervising radiation detection operations, ensuring proper safety equipment is used, and making real-time decisions regarding radiation protection measures. The assistants to the RPO are typically trained

professionals who support the RPO by carrying out tasks such as setting up and operating radiation detection equipment, marking safe zones, and ensuring that radiation levels are monitored continuously. Their duties often include:

i Assessing radiation levels: By using radiation detection tools, the RPO and their team measure radiation in various locations to map out the affected area.

ii Determining the source and spread of contamination: Once radiation levels are measured, the RPO will identify the location of radioactive sources and assess how far the contamination has spread.

iii Implementing safety protocols: Based on the findings, they will implement containment strategies to protect both the team and the public from further exposure.

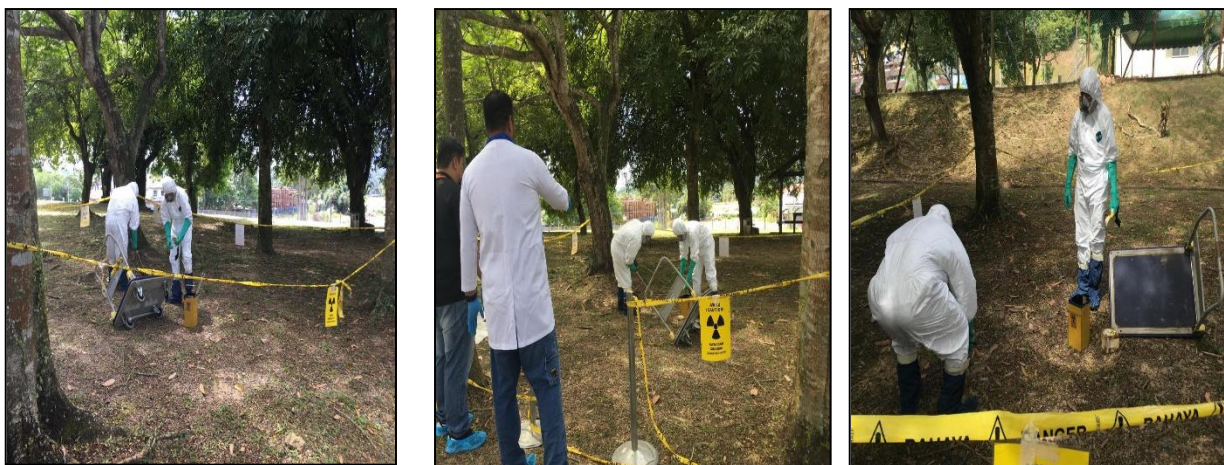


Figure 2: Identification of radioactive sources

Radiation detection involves a methodical process of using specialized equipment to assess radiation levels at the affected site. This process must be executed carefully to avoid accidental exposure to harmful radiation [11]. The steps involved typically include:

i Surveying the Area: The RPO and assistants will perform a thorough survey of the affected area using handheld radiation detection devices, such as Geiger counters or scintillation detectors, to detect the presence of radiation. These devices measure the intensity of radiation (e.g., gamma, beta, or alpha radiation) in real time.

ii Mapping Radiation Levels: Detection points are marked and recorded to create a detailed map of radiation hotspots, including areas with higher radiation levels, lower levels, or clean zones. This

helps in identifying the exact location of the radioactive source.

iii Identifying the Type of Radiation: Different types of radiation (alpha, beta, gamma) require different detection methods. The RPO must ensure that the appropriate instruments are used to detect each type. For instance, alpha particles might be detected using an alpha scintillation counter, while gamma rays require a gamma survey meter.

iv Establishing Contamination Zones: Based on radiation readings, the RPO will demarcate contamination zones (e.g., hot zones, warm zones, cold zones) to minimize the risk to personnel and the public. These zones help in controlling access and ensuring that only authorized and protected individuals enter hazardous areas.

Radiation detection must follow strict protocols and guidelines to ensure safety during the investigation. These procedures are outlined in radiation safety manuals, regulatory requirements, and emergency response plans. These procedures include:

- i Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): The RPO and assistants must wear appropriate PPE, such as radiation suits, gloves, respirators, and dosimeters, to protect themselves from radiation exposure during detection.
- ii Radiation Monitoring: Continuous monitoring is essential during detection operations. Portable radiation detectors must be used regularly to measure the radiation exposure the team receives, ensuring it remains within safe limits.
- iii Radiation Exposure Limits: The RPO ensures that the team's cumulative radiation exposure does not exceed safe limits as established by regulatory authorities (e.g., the Atomic Energy Licensing Board). If exposure exceeds these limits, further actions, such as evacuation or relocation, are required.
- iv Safe Distances: The RPO will establish and enforce safe distances between the radiation source and the team. These distances are determined based on the intensity of radiation detected, the type of radiation, and the duration of exposure.

One of the primary concerns during radiation detection is preventing harmful exposure to both the investigation team and the public nearby. To ensure this:

- i Radiation Shielding: In areas with high radiation levels, shielding materials such as lead, concrete, or specially designed barriers may be used to protect the team. The team should remain behind these shields whenever possible.

- ii Minimizing Time and Maximizing Distance: The investigation team will aim to spend as little time as possible near high-radiation areas and maintain as much distance as feasible from the radiation source. This principle is known as the "time, distance, and shielding" approach to radiation protection.

- iii Public Safety and Evacuation: The RPO must coordinate with local authorities (police, fire services) to ensure that the public is evacuated from or restricted access to high-radiation zones. Public safety warnings are issued, and safety perimeters are enforced to keep civilians at a safe distance.

In environments involving radioactive materials, cross-contamination is a significant concern. The RPO ensures that:

- i Decontamination Procedures: The team follows decontamination protocols, including using air filters, washing down equipment, and disinfecting contaminated tools to prevent spreading radioactive material to clean areas or other team members.
- ii Monitoring Equipment: All equipment used for radiation detection is thoroughly monitored and cleaned after use to prevent the spread of radioactive particles to unaffected areas.

The detection of radiation by the RPO and their assistants is a precise and vital task that requires strict adherence to safety protocols and detailed procedures. By following proper detection methods, using the appropriate tools, and ensuring that the team is equipped with the right protective gear, the investigation team can accurately locate radioactive sources while minimizing exposure to themselves and the public. This careful approach ensures the situation is handled in a way that prioritizes the safety of all involved, both in the immediate area and in the wider community [12].

(iii) Ensure the Area is Safe Before Leaving

After radiation detection and emergency response activities have been carried out, the investigation team, led by the Radiation Protection Officer (RPO), must take definitive steps to ensure that the affected area is cleared of any radioactive contamination. This involves several key tasks:

i Final Survey of the Area: The team must conduct a final, thorough survey using radiation detection instruments such as Geiger counters, scintillation detectors, and other radiation survey meters to check every corner of the affected area. These tools are

used to measure the residual radiation levels and confirm that no radioactive material remains in the area.

ii Verification of Decontamination: If decontamination efforts were carried out (e.g., cleaning contaminated surfaces or equipment), the team must verify that these procedures were effective. This includes checking for any traces of radioactive material on surfaces, walls, floors, equipment, and in the air. If any traces of contamination are detected, further cleaning or remediation steps will be required before the area can be deemed safe.



Figure 3: Decontamination process

The investigation team will focus on ensuring that radiation levels have fallen to a point that complies with regulatory standards [13]. For example, levels must be within the allowable exposure limits set by authorities like the Department of Atomic Energy or international standards set by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

It is crucial that no radioactive material is left behind in the affected area to prevent future contamination or exposure. This includes:

i Inspection of Equipment and Tools: All equipment used during the investigation, including radiation detectors, protective gear, and decontamination tools, must be inspected to ensure they are not

contaminated. If any item is found to be contaminated, it must be properly decontaminated or disposed of according to safety protocols.

- ii **Removal of Radioactive Waste:** If any radioactive waste was generated during the incident (e.g., from equipment cleanup, leaking containers, or byproducts of the accident), it must be securely removed and properly disposed of in compliance with radiation safety regulations. This may involve placing the waste in specialized containers that prevent the spread of contamination.

The team must ensure that there are no hidden radioactive materials that could be missed during initial cleanup efforts. This could include checking ventilation systems, drains, or cracks in the walls where radioactive particles might have settled.

Once the investigation team confirms that no radioactive materials remain and that radiation levels are within safe limits, the area can be declared safe for re-entry. This process typically includes:

- i **Safety Confirmation:** The RPO, in collaboration with local authorities (e.g., health and safety officers, municipal representatives), will confirm that the area is safe for public access. This may involve issuing a clearance certificate or a safety statement to indicate that the area is free from any radiation hazards.
- ii **Public Communication:** Clear communication with the public is vital. Once the area is deemed safe, the company or emergency response team may issue public advisories or announcements to inform the community that the danger has been resolved, and they can safely return to the area. This helps to restore public confidence and prevent unnecessary anxiety.

Before leaving the scene, the investigation team, including the RPO and their assistants, should also conduct a final risk assessment [14]. This involves ensuring that there are no lingering risks from radiation exposure, and that all potential threats have been mitigated. In some cases, ongoing monitoring may be required after the incident to ensure that no hidden radioactive material is released into the environment.

- i **Long-term Monitoring:** Depending on the scale of the incident, there may be a need for continued radiation monitoring over a period of time to ensure that radiation levels remain stable and that no latent contamination surfaces. Local authorities or health agencies might be tasked with monitoring the environment (air, water, soil) for residual radiation levels.
- ii **Health Surveillance:** Workers who were exposed to the affected area may undergo health surveillance to monitor for any potential effects of radiation exposure. Similarly, the public, particularly those who may have been in proximity to the affected area, could be monitored for any signs of radiation exposure, even if the exposure is deemed low risk.

The company, as the entity responsible for the premises, must work closely with the RPO and assistants to ensure that the proper protocols are followed. This includes providing necessary resources, ensuring adequate training for staff, and being fully prepared for any radiation-related incidents. The RPO, as the primary radiation safety expert, must make informed decisions based on real-time data from radiation surveys, manage emergency response efforts, and communicate effectively with local authorities and the public. The RPO's leadership and expertise are essential in making sure the incident is handled swiftly and safely. The assistants play a crucial role in supporting the RPO's efforts, from carrying out radiation

detection to ensuring safety equipment is used properly and assisting in decontamination efforts. Their prompt action and adherence to safety procedures are vital to resolving the incident without unnecessary delay.

The final expectation is that with all the necessary preparations, safety measures, and coordinated efforts from the company, the RPO, and their team, the radiation emergency will be resolved without exposing the public to harm. This involves effectively containing the hazard, cleaning up the affected area, ensuring proper disposal of radioactive materials, and safely declaring the site free from radiation threats. The goal is to not only address the immediate emergency but also to ensure that no long-term risks remain, allowing for a return to normal operations or public activities without fear of radiation exposure [15].

Before leaving the scene, it is essential for the investigation team to confirm that the affected area has been thoroughly cleared of radioactive material and that it no longer poses a radiation risk. Through a meticulous process of radiation detection, decontamination, and verification, the team ensures that the area is safe for re-entry. With swift, well-coordinated actions from the company, RPO, and assistants, the incident should be resolved effectively, protecting the public from any radiation-related harm and ensuring compliance with safety regulations. Simulated dose measurements were conducted at key points within the contaminated area, showing that the maximum recorded dose did not exceed 100 μSv . The average response time from detection to decontamination was approximately 20 minutes, demonstrating the efficiency of the coordinated response protocol.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the response to a radiation emergency requires a systematic and carefully

coordinated approach to ensure both the safety of the investigation team and the public. First, the team must obtain the necessary safety equipment, including protective gear and radiation detection devices, to minimize the risk of exposure. Next, the Radiation Protection Officer (RPO) and assistants must conduct thorough radiation detection to accurately identify the location of radioactive sources, following established procedures to prevent harmful exposure. Finally, before leaving the scene, it is crucial for the team to confirm that the area has been properly decontaminated, that no radioactive materials remain, and that the site is safe for public access. With prompt, efficient action from the company, RPO, and their team, the incident can be resolved safely, preventing any harm from radiation exposure to the public.

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Article History

Received: 27-02-2025

Accepted: 04-12-2025