

M. C. Penley

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DISTRIBUTION OF FISSION PRODUCT
CONTAMINATION IN THE SRE

By
R. S. HART

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ABSTRACT

In the safety analysis of sodium-cooled reactors, a remaining area of significant uncertainty has been the fate of various fission products that may be released to the coolant in the event of a fuel element failure; that is, the degree of their retainment in the sodium, movement to the reactor cover gas system or deposition in other portions of the primary system. During the recovery procedures following the fuel element damage that occurred at the Sodium Reactor Experiment (SRE) in July 1959,^{1,2} the opportunity was provided for obtaining such data on a full-scale basis. As a consequence, the collection and analysis of pertinent information from this incident was undertaken as part of the objectives of a concurrent project which involved experimental investigation into the solubility of certain fission products in sodium.³

Although the necessity for compatibility with the reactor recovery efforts imposed severe restrictions on certain aspects of the project, a number of conclusions can be drawn from the data. The principal ones are:

1. Although significant fuel melting did not occur, some degree of preferential fission products volatility is involved in the relative release of the various fission products into the primary coolant.
2. Only Xe and Kr isotopes were found in the reactor cover gas (helium).
3. The carbonaceous particulate material, resulting from the decomposition of tetralin which leaked into the primary sodium, proved to be an effective fission product scavenger. A generally non-selective concentration of activity by this material of 10^3 to 10^4 times that of the filtered sodium was measured.
4. The cold trap located in the primary system was effective in removing fission product contamination.

5. Appreciable deposition of fission product contamination occurred throughout the primary piping system. A marked selectivity was evident in this process, with Sr, Ce and Zr-Nb deposition being much greater than that of Cs or I.
6. Although 5,000 to 10,000 curies of fission product activity were unexpectedly released to the primary sodium system, no radiological emergency of any nature occurred. Moreover, recovery operations were completed at a reasonable speed well within accepted personnel exposure limits. The same sodium is still in use during current operation of the SRE, with only Cs¹³⁷ and possibly Sb¹²⁵ remaining as significant, dissolved, long-lived contamination. Even these are now reduced to the same order as the Na²² activity ($\sim 10^{-2}$ $\mu\text{c}/\text{gram}$), and their presence should not appreciably affect future operations of the reactor.

INTRODUCTION

One of the unique qualities of sodium-cooled reactors with respect to radiological safety is the potential fission-product retention ability of the coolant. The principal factors providing this ability are: (1) the occurrence of chemical reactions between the coolant and certain fission products leading to less volatile compounds (e. g. NaI), and (2) the mechanical trapping nature of the liquid coolant for particulate fission products in general. The maintenance of a coolant pool above the core in sodium reactors even with the postulation of severe reactor accidents ensures the continued effectiveness of this capacity.

An opportunity was recently afforded to obtain at least some qualitative data on this aspect of sodium-cooled reactors subsequent to the fuel element damage that occurred in the Sodium Reactor Experiment (SRE) in July 1959. This report is a summary of the fission product release and distribution data which were collected during the interval of modification and cleaning of the reactor prior to the attainment of criticality with the second core loading in September 1960.

I. THE SODIUM REACTOR EXPERIMENT

A. REACTOR SYSTEM DESIGN

The brief description of the SRE presented here is intended only to provide the necessary background for this report. Additional details may be found in Reference 4.

The SRE is a sodium-cooled, graphite-moderated, thermal power reactor. It was built primarily as a development tool with emphasis on investigation of fuel materials. A cutaway view of the reactor is shown in Figure 1.

1. Coolant Systems

Reactor coolant flow is single pass, with sodium flowing up through the core and collecting above it in a top pool. Over this pool, helium, as a blanket gas, is maintained at ~ 3 psig. Induced Na^{24} activity in the primary loop introduces the desirability for an intermediate heat exchanger in which the reactor heat is transferred to the secondary loop containing nonradioactive sodium.

Figure 2 presents a schematic representation of the cooling system. At full power (20 Mw) the sodium at a temperature of 500°F passes from the lower plenum up through the fuel channels, absorbing heat from the fuel elements, and discharges into the upper pool about 6 ft deep at a mixed mean temperature of 960°F .

Cold traps maintain sodium oxide content at specified low levels in the sodium cooling systems. The cold trap consists of a tank containing stainless steel wire mesh which serves as a filtering agent for the oxide precipitated from the cooled sodium flowing through the trap. These traps are capable of maintaining the oxide content of the sodium at less than 10 ppm.

2. Inert Gas System

Helium is supplied to parts of the system containing a free surface of sodium. In the primary coolant system, the core helium blanket and helium maintained in the primary sodium fill tank are interconnected and vented through the gaseous waste system. The gases discharged from this system are diverted to one of four shielded storage tanks. If necessary, they are held up here for radioactive decay prior to release at permissible concentrations through the building exhaust system.

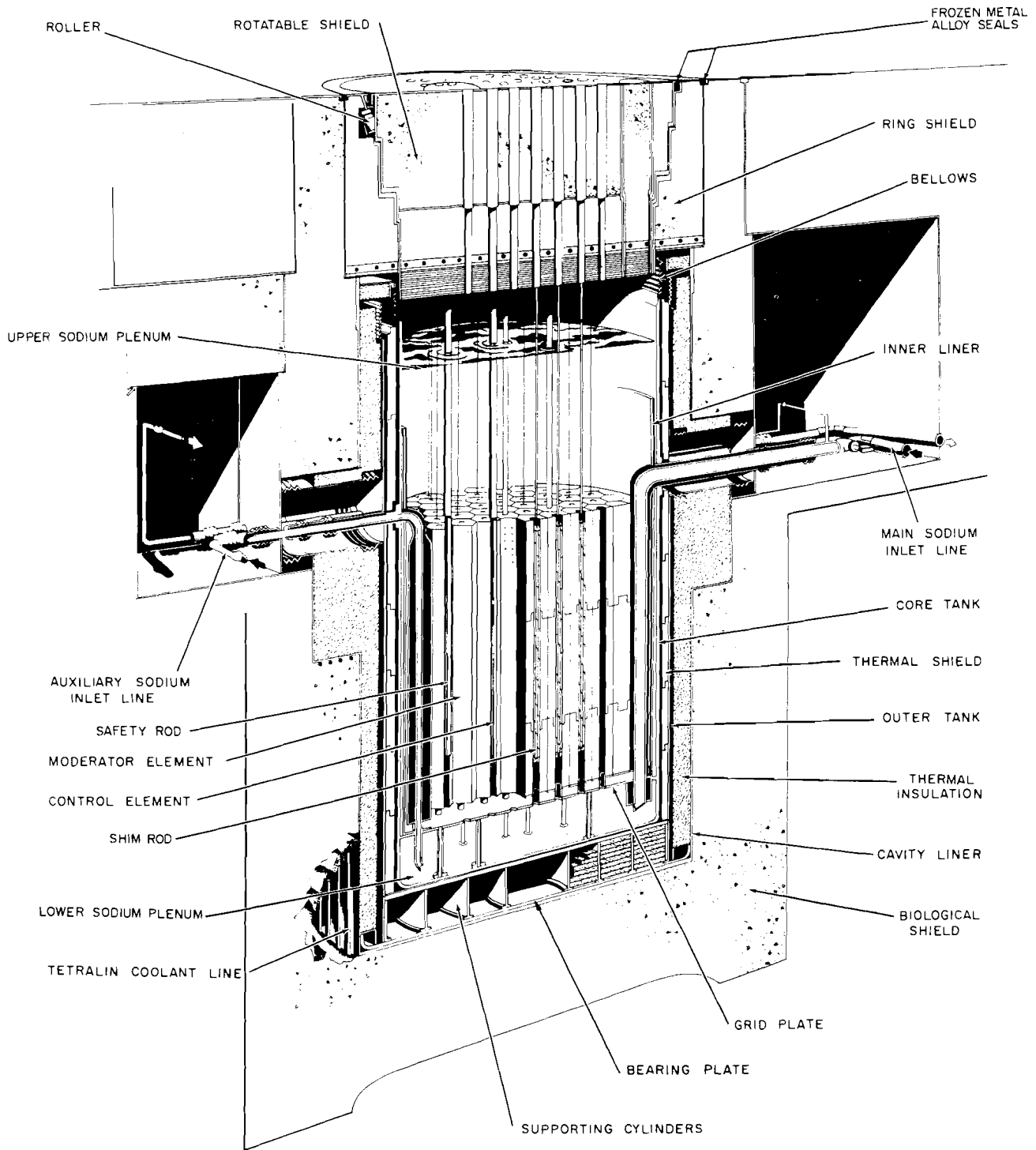


Figure 1. Cutaway View of SRE Reactor

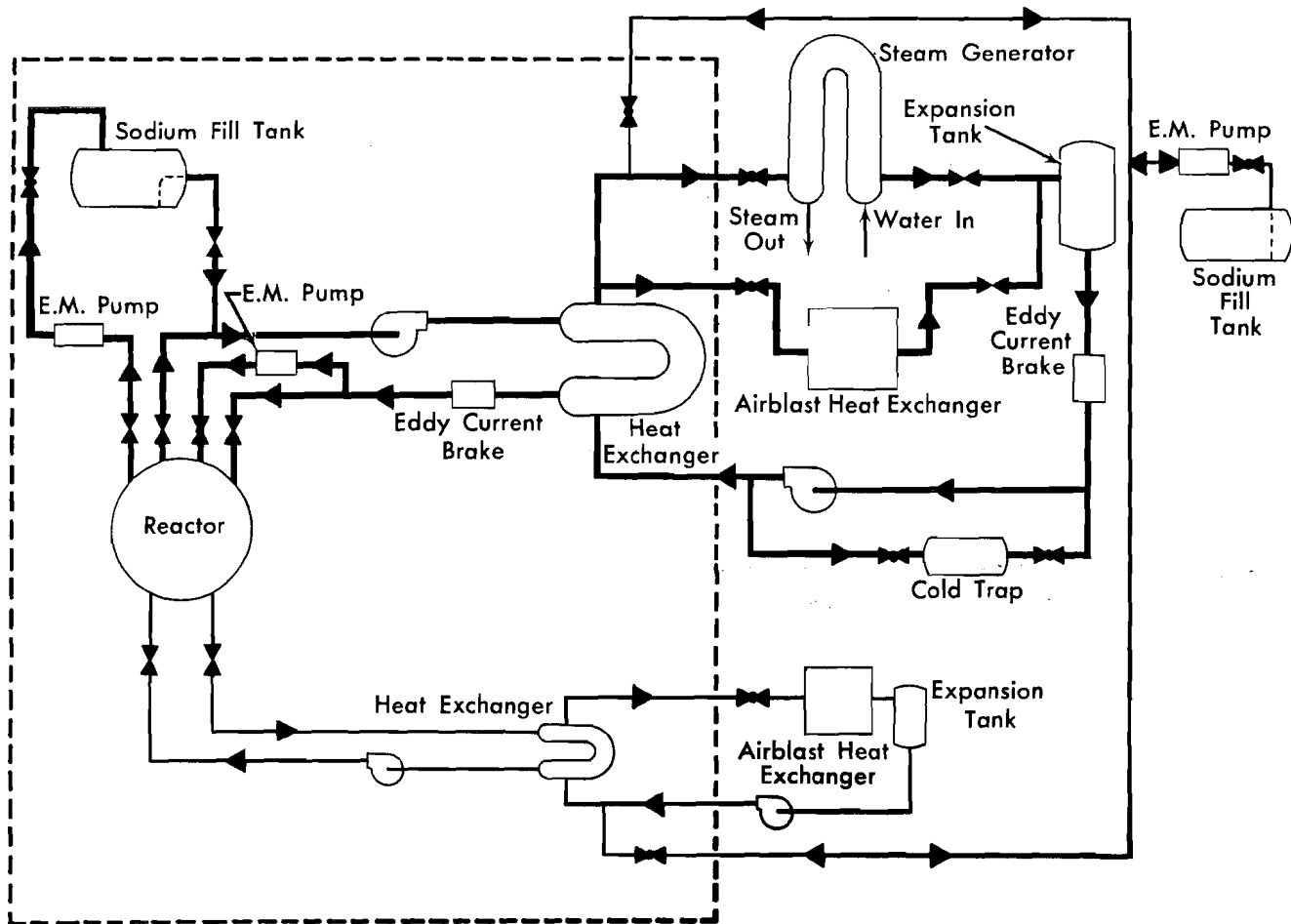


Figure 2. SRE Cooling System

3. Fuel Elements

The original fuel elements (Figure 3) were fabricated in clusters of seven rods, each consisting of a 6-ft-high column of uranium slugs in a thin-walled (0.010-in.) stainless steel jacket tube. The 12 slugs are 0.75 in. in diameter and 6 in. long. They are thermally bonded to the jacket by a 0.010-in. NaK annulus. Above the column of slugs is a void space containing helium. This gas-filled space allows expansion of the bonding NaK and serves as a reservoir for any fission gases escaping from the fuel slugs. The six outside rods of the cluster are spirally wrapped with stainless steel wire to provide spacing between adjacent rods and between rods and the process channel within the moderator can.

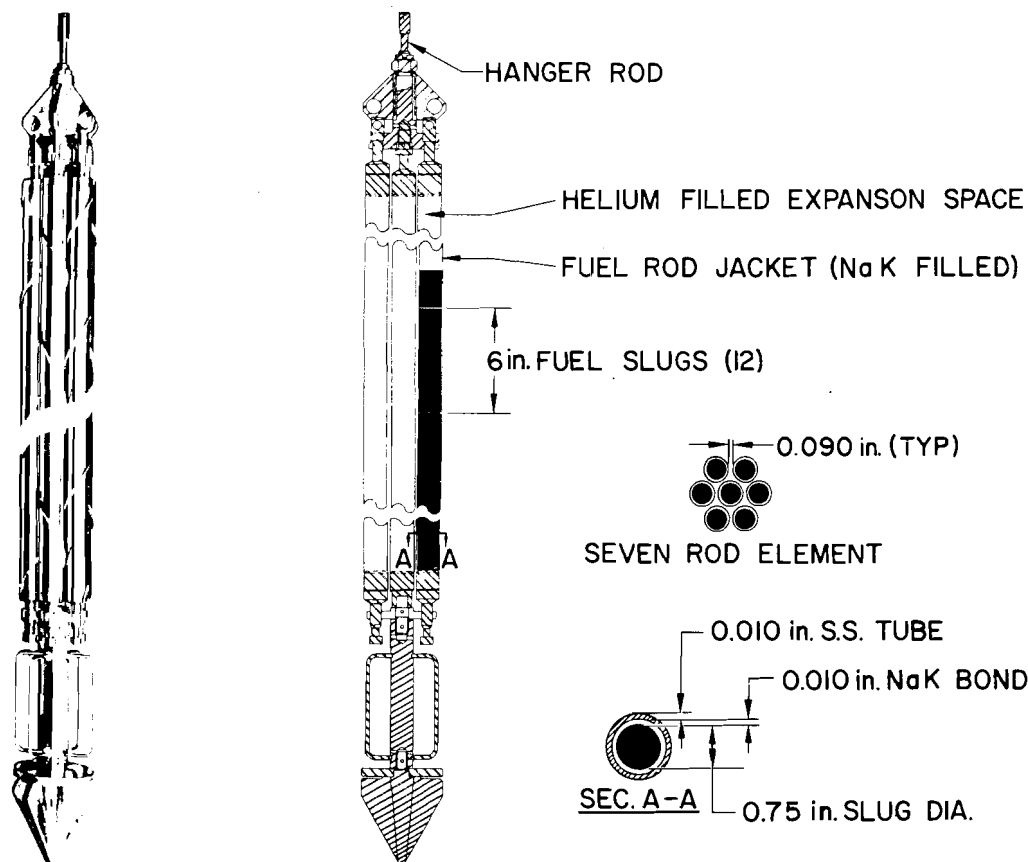


Figure 3. Typical SRE Fuel Element

4. Sodium and Helium Sampling Facilities

The capability for taking primary sodium samples during reactor operation was provided in the Material Evaluations Facility. In practice, however, operating procedures required that the reactor be shut down and primary sodium flow be stopped before taking sodium specimens. In some instances, sodium samples were taken directly out of the primary pool through top shield plugs. In this case, flow could continue, but the reactor had to be shut down.

Connections are provided for taking samples from the gas decay tanks at any time. Direct samples from the primary pool blanket gas may be taken by drawing the helium into an evacuated container from a suitable connection, usually the helium fill line.*

*At the present time, means for obtaining spot samples of the reactor cover gas are provided on the line which supplies the recently installed continuous cover gas monitor.⁵

B. OPERATIONAL HISTORY PRIOR TO JULY 26, 1959

A summary of the operating history of the reactor appears in Table I. A detailed account of this history is given in Reference 1, and only items specifically relating to the subject of this report are repeated here.

1. Primary Sodium Samples

At 20-Mwt power, the saturated Na^{24} activity of the primary sodium is ~ 0.2 c/g. The resultant radiation levels usually prevent routine access to parts of the primary coolant system for one to two weeks after reactor shutdown. Similarly, radioactive analyses of primary sodium samples were usually delayed by at least this length of time. However, measurements were made periodically, some typical results being shown in Table II. The isotopes listed include those inherent with the sodium activation (Na^{24} , Na^{22}), mass transfer activation (e.g., Cr^{51}), and fission products (e.g., I^{131}). The fission products identified may have originated either from "tramp" uranium in the system (as a sodium impurity) or small fuel cladding imperfections. The analyses were made using a 256-channel gamma spectrometer, either on an untreated sample, or, on occasions, following chemical separation of the major components indicated by the gross scan.

2. Reactor Cover Gas Samples

The helium cover gas was periodically sampled and assayed for radioactive content. Most of the samples were taken during shutdown intervals of reactor operation. Principally because of this delay in obtaining gas samples, the dominant radioactive contamination was Xe^{133} ($T_{1/2} = 5.3$ days). Attempts to detect iodine invariably gave negative results. The usual irregularity of reactor power and operating time makes any quantitative relationship of cover gas radioactivity difficult, but it is apparent from Table III that the normal Xe^{133} concentration at 20 Mwt was of the order of 10^{-3} to 10^{-4} $\mu\text{c}/\text{cc}$. During reactor operation, the presence of shorter lived rare gas isotopes (e.g., Xe^{135}) may have increased the gross level to perhaps 10^{-2} $\mu\text{c}/\text{cc}$ or so as evidenced by the sample taken February 26, 1959.

TABLE I
SUMMARY OF SRE POWER OPERATION
(Prior to July 26, 1959)

Power Run	Time Interval	Actual Operating Days	Average Thermal Power (Mw)	Total Irradiation (Mwd)	Total Irradiation Accumulated Since Startup (Mwd)
1	7/9/57 - 7/15/57				
2	7/25/57 - 7/26/57	5.7	3.93	22.6	22.6
3	11/7/57 - 11/29/57	12.6	6.20	78.2	100.8
4	5/21/58 - 5/28/58	13.3	8.73	116.2	217.0
5	7/18/58 - 8/4/58	11.5	17.70	203.8	420.8
6	8/8/58 - 9/1/58	22.0	17.90	394.0	814.8
7	9/8/58 - 9/25/58	17.2	17.80	306.0	1120.8
8	11/29/58 - 1/29/59	37.0	16.15	597.8	1718.6
9	2/14/59 - 2/26/59	11.5	11.0	126.5	1845.1
10	3/6/59 - 3/7/59	0.6	5.3	3.1	1848.2
11	3/13/59 - 4/6/59	23.6	12.4	293.5	2141.1
12	5/14/59 - 5/24/59	9.7	15.9	154.3	2295.4
13	5/27/59 - 6/3/59	6.6	17.3	114.3	2409.7
14	7/12/59 - 7/26/59	14.2	1.1	16.1	2425.8

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TABLE II
TYPICAL RADIOACTIVITY LEVELS OF SRE
PRIMARY SODIUM PRIOR TO RUN 14

Sample No.	Sampling Location	Date of Sample Removal	Date of Last Reactor Scram	Specific Activity ($\mu\text{c/g Na}$)									
				Na ²²	Na ²⁴	Cr ⁵¹	Zr-Nb ⁹⁵	Ru ¹⁰³	Ru ¹⁰⁶	I ¹³¹	Cs ¹³⁷	Ba-La ¹⁴⁰	Ce ¹⁴¹
R-24	MEF*	10/2/58	9/25/58	6.2(-3) [†]	1.9(-1)	4.0(-2)	---	5.9(-4)	2.2(-3)	5.1(-3)	5.1(-4)	---	---
R-27	Reactor Pool	2/6/59	1/29/59	1.2(-2)	---	---	5.2(-2)	8.0(-4)	---	1.6(-2)	6.5(-4)	2.8(-4)	5.4(-4)
R-32	MEF	4/14/59	4/6/59	---	---	---	2.9(-3)	---	---	4.0(-2)	1.5(-2)	---	4.3(-2)

*Material Evaluation Facility

[†]Values in parentheses indicate power of ten by which preceding numbers should be multiplied.

3. Miscellaneous Items of Radiological Interest

a. Primary System Components

Normally access to the main primary gallery is not attempted until at least two weeks after reactor shutdown which permits sufficient decay of the Na²⁴. However, a gradual buildup of long-lived radiation fields in the gallery was noted as operation of the reactor continued. At the last measurement (April 18, 1959) prior to run 14, the radiation levels ranged from 50 to 420 mr/hr. Since at the time of these measurements the primary sodium had been drained to fill tank and no significant decay occurred during the next 5 days, it is probable that some degree of long-lived activity accumulation was taking place on the piping surfaces although piping activation from neutrons leaking from the core was also a factor.

The atmosphere of the main primary gallery (nitrogen) was sampled occasionally for radioactivity. The usual levels were $\sim 1 \times 10^{-5} \mu\text{c/cc}$.

Radiation measurements were also taken periodically near the primary system cold trap. Since this trap is not operated continuously, the quantitative significance of these data is difficult to interpret, but it does serve to indicate relative amounts of foreign radioactivity removal from the primary sodium. The levels measured prior to run 14 usually varied from a few mr/hr to about 1 r/hr at ~ 1 ft from the surface, after the decay of Na²⁴.

TABLE III
 TYPICAL RADIOACTIVITY ANALYSIS
 OF SRE COVER GAS
 PRIOR TO RUN 14

Date Sample Taken	Specific Activity ($\mu\text{c}/\text{cc}$)
12/11/58	1.9×10^{-3}
12/15/58	1.0×10^{-3}
2/14/59	1.7×10^{-3}
2/26/59	$6.0 \times 10^{-2*}$
5/26/59	1.7×10^{-3}
6/13/59	1.8×10^{-5}
6/16/59	1.8×10^{-5}
6/20/59	3.8×10^{-5}

*Taken shortly after reactor shutdown

b. Routinely Occupied Areas of the Reactor Building

Radiation levels in routinely occupied areas in and around the reactor building are normally quite low; however, there have been specific instances of temporary relatively high radiation fields and/or airborne radioactivity. Often these have been attributable to some particular operation, such as fuel handling. On several occasions, however, above normal airborne radioactivity was detected in the high-bay area over the reactor loading face during routine operation of reactor. It is likely that some small leakage of the cover gas volume usually existed through the reactor loading face complex into the high-bay area. This slow leakage coupled with the comparatively low levels of radioactivity existing in the cover gas normally precluded detection after mixing with the large volume of air above. Occasionally, increased activity levels in the cover gas, perhaps coupled with increased leakage rates, probably resulted in the appearance of relatively high airborne activity in the reactor floor area.

II. FISSION PRODUCT DATA SUBSEQUENT TO JULY, 1959 SHUTDOWN

During the course of power run 14 on the SRE, a number of fuel cladding failures occurred. As a result of these failures, significant quantities (estimated at 5,000 to 10,000 curies) of fission products were released to the primary coolant system. Following the shutdown of the reactor on July 26, 1959 recovery procedures were immediately undertaken. In addition, numerous system modifications⁵ were made during the recovery interval leading to the reattainment of criticality with a thorium-uranium fuel loading on September 7, 1960.

It is apparent the vast majority of the fission product release to the primary coolant took place during run 14, July 12 to 26, 1959. Principally based on evidence of radioactivity in the gas decay tanks and occurrences of high airborne radioactivity in the operating area, it would appear that at least some and perhaps most of the release occurred during the first few days of this period. However, since reactor operation continued until 1120 on July 26, this latter date will be used as the zero decay point for fission product contamination calculations. A complete description and analysis of the events leading up to the fuel element damage and of subsequent recovery operations may be found in the two reports issued by the Atomics International Ad Hoc Committee.^{1,2}

A. PRIMARY SODIUM SAMPLES

The Na²⁴ activity in the primary coolant delayed the procurement of the first sodium sample until August 2, about 7 days after reactor shutdown. It should be noted that during this interval, circulation and cold-trapping of the primary sodium continued; thus the loss of some portion of the fission product activity originally present prior to obtaining the first sample was certainly possible. Subsequent sodium samples were taken at irregular intervals, principally because of the inconvenient methods available and a necessary compatibility with recovery operations. Table IV presents a tabulation of the results of the fission product analyses of the initial sodium sample and also compares the fraction of each isotope released based on calculations of the total reactor inventory as of July 26, 1959.

TABLE IV
INITIAL FISSION PRODUCT ANALYSIS OF SRE
PRIMARY SODIUM

Isotope	Pri. Coolant Act. ($\mu\text{c/g Na}$)*	Total Coolant Inv. (curies)*	Total Reactor Inv. (curies)*	Fraction of Inv. Released†
Cs ¹³⁷	1.26	2.77×10^1	8.70×10^3	3.18×10^{-3}
Cs ¹³⁴	0.02	$\sim 4 \times 10^{-1}$	2×10^2 §	2×10^{-3} §
Sr ⁸⁹	20.0	4.44×10^2	1.60×10^5	2.78×10^{-3}
Sr ⁹⁰	0.97	2.14×10^1	8.15×10^3	2.63×10^{-3}
I ¹³¹	0.74	1.63×10^1	1.68×10^4	0.97×10^{-3}
Ce ¹⁴¹	4.38	9.65×10^1	1.27×10^5	0.76×10^{-3} 4
Ce ¹⁴⁴	5.18	1.41×10^2	1.69×10^5	0.67×10^{-3} 8.3 x 10 ⁻⁴
Ba(La) ¹⁴⁰	1.65	3.63×10^1	5.61×10^4	0.65×10^{-3} 4
Zr ⁹⁵ + Nb ⁹⁵	13.9	3.06×10^2	5.53×10^5	0.55×10^{-3} 4
Ru ¹⁰³	0.95	2.09×10^1	7.52×10^4	0.28×10^{-3}

*As of July 26, 1959

†Multiply values in this column by ~ 3 to adjust fraction released to average values for those fuel elements which suffered cladding failures (14 of 43 elements failed).

§From neutron capture in Cs¹³³; estimated.

The next sodium sample was obtained on October 16. The fission product analysis of this sample indicated surprisingly large decreases in contamination, in some cases greater than a thousand-fold. However, subsequent samples showed that, for some reason, this second sample was not representative. The data from this sample are listed in the appendix for information only. The third sodium sample was taken on October 31, 1959. Since approximately 3 months elapsed between this sample and the initial one, it is interesting to compare the decrease in fission product contamination beyond that due to radioactive decay. Table V presents such a comparison for these isotopes identified in both samples.

Following the procurement of the October 31 sodium sample, extensive efforts followed in the next few months to cleanse physically the primary sodium of foreign matter, principally of the carbonaceous material formed by the decomposition of tetralin. These procedures included draining the entire primary system into the drain-and-fill tank through a specially constructed wire mesh filter, vacuuming the carbonaceous material from the top of the moderator cans, and prolonged sodium circulation accompanied by cold trapping. The last

sodium sample taken for radioactive analysis prior to startup of the reactor with the new fuel loading was obtained on July 26, 1960. The results are given in Table VI.

TABLE V
FISSION PRODUCT CONTAMINATION DECREASE IN PRIMARY SODIUM
(August 2 to October 31, 1959)

Isotope	Fission Product Contamination ($\mu\text{c/g Na}$)			Ratio $\frac{\text{Oct 31 (actual)}}{\text{Oct 31 (predicted)}}$
	Aug 2	Oct 31 (predicted)*	Oct 31 (actual)	
Cs ¹³⁷	1.26	1.26	0.45	0.36
Cs ¹³⁴	0.02	0.02	0.006	0.3
Sr ⁹⁰	0.97	0.97	0.060	0.062
Sr ⁸⁹	19.0	5.8	0.25	0.043
I ¹³¹	0.42	0.00019	0.00012	0.63
Ce ¹⁴¹	3.7	0.54	0.000088	0.00016
Ce ¹⁴⁴	5.1	3.9	0.00031	0.00008
Zr ⁹⁵ Nb ⁹⁵	13.0	5.2	0.0067	0.0013
Ru ¹⁰³	0.85	0.19	0.0045	0.024

*On the basis of radioactive decay of August 2 sample.

TABLE VI
FINAL RADIOACTIVITY ANALYSIS OF SRE PRIMARY
SODIUM PRIOR TO STARTUP WITH NEW CORE LOADING

Isotope	T _{1/2} (years)	Concentration ($\mu\text{c/g Na}$)*
Na ²²	2.6	1.2×10^{-2}
Cs ¹³⁷	30	2.8×10^{-2}
Sb ¹²⁵	2.7	6.1×10^{-2}

*As of 7/26/60

The disappearance of the I^{131} , Ba-La 140 Ce 141 , and to a lesser extent, Zr-Nb 95 , from this final sample would be expected from natural radioactive decay during this interval of about one year. However, the majority of the decrease in the Ce 144 , Ru 103 (both undetectable in final sodium sample), and Cs 137 must be attributable to other causes. Although a strontium analysis was not made on this final sample before startup, its decrease over and above radioactive decay was established by earlier samples (see Table V).

B. COVER GAS SAMPLES

The first helium cover gas sample during run 14 which gave an indication of unusually high radioactivity was taken on July 18. Since the radiation level at the surface of the 2-liter sample chamber was ~ 30 mr/hr, no further attempt was made to assay the concentration quantitatively. However, assuming that the activity was principally Xe 133 + Xe 135 , a rough estimate would place the level at 2 to 10 $\mu\text{c}/\text{cc}$. It is difficult to interpret cover gas samples subsequent to the July 26 shutdown since bleeding and flushing operations to the gas decay tanks and out the stack were almost immediately commenced. A sample taken on August 12, indicated a gross level of about 1 $\mu\text{c}/\text{cc}$. A gamma spectrometer scan on September 14, of this sample identified the principal remaining contributions as Xe 133 and Kr 85 . Extrapolating the decay of these two isotopes back to shutdown on July 26, yields ~ 7.4 $\mu\text{c}/\text{cc}$ for Xe 133 and 0.016 $\mu\text{c}/\text{cc}$ for Kr 85 . The presence of shorter lived rare gas isotopes probably created a higher gross level at shutdown, but there is some evidence that an appreciable time delay exists between release of the fission gases from the fuel and their escape to the cover gas volume. The Xe 133 value in this sample is in rough agreement with the estimate made from the sample taken on July 18. Using the Xe 133 and Kr 85 values obtained from the August 12 sample, an attempt was made to estimate the fraction released from the core. Table VII presents these data.

The estimated release fractions, although comparable to those non-gaseous elements determined from sodium samples, are probably somewhat lower than actually occurred. Through radioactive decay of the Xe 133 and cover gas purging operations, the fission product contamination level in the reactor cover gas was reduced to 4×10^{-3} $\mu\text{c}/\text{cc}$ (Kr 85) by September 29, 1959.

TABLE VII
FISSION PRODUCT CONTAMINATION IN COVER GAS

Isotope	Cover Gas Conc.* ($\mu\text{c}/\text{cc}$)	Total Cover Gas Inv.*† (curies)	Total Reactor Inv.* (curies)	Fraction Released
Xe ¹³³	7.4	4.7×10^1	5.08×10^4	0.92×10^{-3}
Kr ⁸⁵	0.016	2.0×10^{-1}	1.1×10^3	0.18×10^{-3}

*As of shutdown 7/26/59.

†Includes a factor of two for probable losses due to pressure manipulations on July 18.

C. PRIMARY COOLANT PIPING SAMPLES

Since it became apparent soon after the reactor shutdown that large amounts of fission product contamination in the primary sodium were being removed by means other than radioactive decay, deposition on piping walls was investigated. Some of the deposition appeared to involve simple settling in low velocity portions of the sodium system, as evidenced by radiation surveys following the draining of the primary system. Of perhaps more interest was the deposition which involved a "plating" type mechanism that could not be removed by simple flushing. This type of activity deposition could have an important bearing on the accessibility of certain areas for some time to come. In general, the piping samples were obtained from hot and cold trap areas and consisted of short sections of 1-1/2 in., schedule 40, Type 304 stainless steel pipe which were removed by hack-sawing while filled with frozen sodium. In the analyses the frozen sodium was dug from the pipe as well as possible. Next, any residual sodium was dissolved in methanol and water. Finally, the pipe was subjected to a series of hydrochloric acid etches, with dimensional and weight checks between each etch. The sodium, methanol wash, and etch solutions were each analyzed using a 256-channel gamma spectrometer. Chemical separations were made on some of the etch solutions for strontium analysis by beta counting. Since the amount of fission product deposition in any one region of piping is certainly some function of the exposure conditions (e. g., flow rate and temperature, total volume of flow, position in system, etc.) no attempt to extrapolate quantitatively to the total piping system from the few isolated samples taken was made. However,

the relative deposition between isotopes of different elements is also of interest and probably less sensitive to variance in flow conditions. An example of an etch solution analysis for the "fixed" (i.e., not removed by the methanol wash) pipe contamination is shown in Table VIII.

TABLE VIII
 EXAMPLE OF "FIXED" SRE PRIMARY-SODIUM
 FISSION-PRODUCT PIPING CONTAMINATION

Isotope	Contamination Level ($\mu\text{c}/\text{cm}^2$)*	Ratio*† $\frac{\mu\text{c}/\text{cm}^2 \text{ of pipe surface}}{\mu\text{c}/\text{cc of primary sodium}^*}$
Sr ⁸⁹	15.2	0.76
Sr ⁹⁰	0.78	0.80
Zr-Nb ⁹⁵	2.7	0.19
Ce ¹⁴⁴	2.1	0.41
Cs ¹³⁷	0.022	0.018

*Corrected for radioactive decay since July 26, 1959 for comparative purpose. The actual contamination levels of Sr⁸⁹ and Zr-Nb⁹⁵ may never have been this high.

†Sodium contamination level as determined in first sample after reactor shut-down.

It should also be noted here that certain non-fission product contamination on the piping walls was also identified, principally Mn⁵⁴, Co⁶⁰, and Fe⁵⁹. The levels of these isotopes were roughly comparable to that of the Cs¹³⁷ given in Table VIII ($\sim 10^{-2} \mu\text{c}/\text{cm}^2$ as of 7/26/59). Figure 4 is a plot of the fission product data obtained from this same piping sample as a function of the depth of successive etches.

D. OTHER MEASUREMENTS AND SAMPLING DATA

1. Uranium

Since it was planned to continue the use of the primary sodium for future reactor operation, it was important to ascertain the amount of uranium which

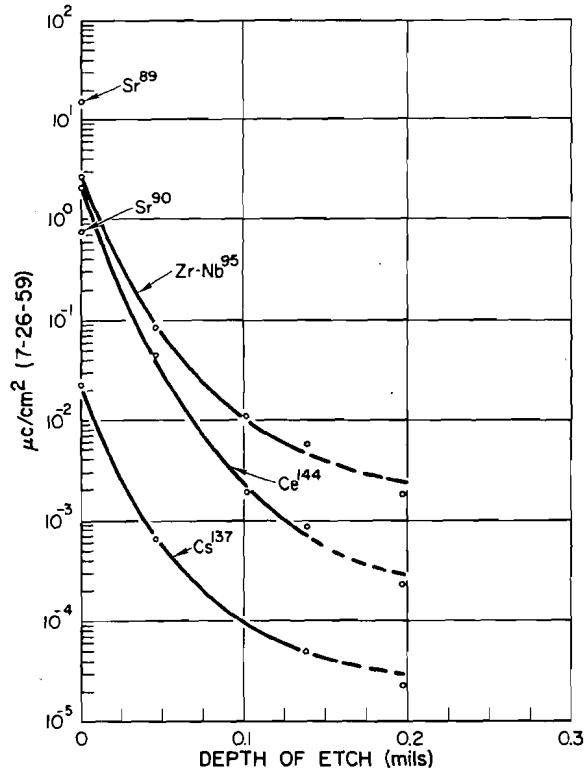


Figure 4. Fixed Fission Product Contamination Remaining on SRE Primary Piping vs Depth of HCL Etch

may have contaminated the sodium as a result of the fuel element damage. The principal concern was over the effect that uranium contamination might have on the future accessibility of the primary system during periods of reactor shutdown. Such contamination could result in high level fission product deposition in the piping system. A secondary concern was the possibility of creating an abnormally high Xe and Kr background activity level in the helium cover gas, thus limiting the sensitivity of the continuous cover gas monitor, which was installed during the recovery and modification effort. Preliminary calculations indicated that while 10 ppm of uranium (2.8% U²³⁵) probably could be tolerated, 1 ppm or less would be highly desirable. An analysis conducted by Argonne National Laboratory showed a concentration of less than 0.2 ppm, which was considered negligible.

2. Non-Fission Product Radioactivity

The Mn⁵⁴, Co⁶⁰, and Fe⁵⁹ contamination on the primary piping system was mentioned earlier. After appreciable decay had taken place, small quantities

of Sb^{125} were also identified. Since the fission yield of this isotope is quite small (0.024%), the primary source is probably due to neutron activation of Sn^{124} impurity in the sodium and its subsequent decay to Sb^{125} . The only other significant non-fission product activity was that due to the formation of Na^{22} in the primary sodium ($\sim 1 \times 10^{-2} \mu\text{c/g Na}$ as of October 1959).

3. Carbonaceous Material

It has been estimated that from 7 to 70 lb of carbon or carbonaceous material may have been deposited in the primary sodium as the result of tetralin leakage prior to run 14. A large fraction of this amount maintained its existence as solid carbon particles throughout the primary system, with some settling occurring in low velocity flow areas. Almost all of the sodium samples obtained were contaminated with small flecks of carbon. These particles were filtered from the sodium samples after dissolving and analyzed separately. In some cases, carbonaceous samples were obtained directly from the top of the moderator cans after lowering of the sodium pool level. Radioactivity analysis of this material showed a much higher concentration of fission product contamination per unit weight than in the filtered sodium. Table IX gives the results from a typical sample and, for comparison purposes, also indicates the corresponding contamination of the accompanying sodium sample.

TABLE IX

RADIOACTIVITY ANALYSIS OF TYPICAL SAMPLE OF CARBONACEOUS MATERIAL FROM PRIMARY SODIUM SAMPLE

Isotope	Activity of Carbonaceous Material* ($\mu\text{c/g}$ of particles)†	Activity of Sodium ($\mu\text{c/g Na}$)†
Cs^{137}	1.1×10^3	0.45
Cs^{134}	2.9×10^1	0.006
Ce^{141}	2.3×10^2	0.0007
Ce^{144}	2.9×10^2	0.00039
Zr Nb^{95}	2.2×10^2	0.018

*Obtained from reactor on 10/31/59

†As of 7/26/59

