

INL News Release
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Electrical subcontractor encounters PCBs at INL

Four workers with an electrical subcontractor to Idaho National Laboratory were removing electrical cables from conduit at the Experimental Breeder Reactor-II Power Plant Building on July 12. During the course of work an INL engineer noted the electrical cables had a film of oily substance that he suspected might contain polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). INL is investigating the equipment and area to ensure that no further small levels of contamination are detected.

Recognition of suspected PCBs in the work area initiated a stoppage of all work activities and the isolation and control of the immediate work environment, potentially contaminated with PCBs. Follow-up analysis verified the oil to contain approximately 26 percent PCBs. Historically, PCBs have been used in a myriad of applications due to their heat transfer properties and their ability to withstand heat exposure. PCBs are classified by the EPA as a probable human carcinogen and their use has been eliminated from nearly all industrial applications. Legacy PCBs are also subject to strict regulatory control to prevent/minimize uncontrolled releases to the environment.

The four subcontract employees were also found to have PCB contamination to their gloves, boots, work clothing, and areas of exposed skin. These exposures have been evaluated by INL physicians and are not believed to present a health concern to the four employees. INL physicians and officials have spoken with the four individuals about the incident and ongoing clean-up activities.

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