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LOS ALAMOS SCIENTIFIC LABORATORY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
LOS ALAMOS, NEW MEXICO

OFFICE MEMORANDUM

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NO 1 OF 4 COPIES, SERIES 1

TO : Dean D. Meyer, Group Leader, H-1  
FROM : Chas. D. Blackwell, General Monitoring Section, H-1  
SUBJECT: EXCAVATION AND SHOT IN CHAMBER #2 AT "HOT POINT", TA-33  
SYMBOL : H-1-M-20

DATE: April 23, 1952

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Plans for this operation were submitted to this Section a few weeks before the operation was to begin. The plans came by telephone from the different outfits that were to be involved in the operation. Plans were changed several times to meet any situation that might arise and were in no concrete form. It was agreed that the extent of the operation would depend upon the amount and extent of contamination and the condition of the concrete room.

Heavy equipment, to be operated by the Zia riggers, was taken to "Hot Point" on April 7, 1952, and placed in position. Before the equipment was placed, the area over the shaft had been checked and found to be negligible in counts per minute. Operations began on the morning of April 8, 1952, which consisted of removing the dirt from the shaft leading down to the concrete room. The shaft measured approximately 6'x8' and extends downward for 46 feet. The shaft had been shored up completely by 2"x12" timbers with 8"x8" extending from top to bottom in all four corners. The shaft had been filled with sand which made removal by clam shell a simple operation. The sand was slightly damp so the dust problem was at a minimum. At the bottom of the shaft, extending south, was the concrete room which was reinforced with steel. The room had a 12' ceiling and was octagon-shaped. The room measured 14' from side to side. The door of the room was made of steel plate and wood filled. The edges of the door were wedge-shaped, so that the more pressure applied on the door from within, the tighter the door would be closed. The door was secured by a steel latch 3/8" thick and 3"-4" wide, operated by a handle on the outside of the door.

As the dirt was removed from the shaft it was monitored for alpha contamination and the count was found to be negative. Frequent checks were in the shaft as the dirt was removed and this was also found to be free from radioactive contamination. All personnel entering the shaft during and after the removal of the dirt wore full protective clothing, even though it was checked each time before personnel from other outfits were permitted to enter. There was a possibility that fissures could be opened in the shaft which would allow some contamination to seep in. No radioactive contamination was found in the sand that was removed from the shaft, even down to the floor level of the room. The first contamination to be found was on the steel box on the south side of the room. It had



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6-22-79  
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ruptured during the shot, leaving a crack about 1/4" wide. This box housed the wiring from the room and was fed from the box to the surface by three steel pipes. Approximately 8000 c/m was found on the steel box about four inches above where the seam had ruptured. The rest of the steel box had very little or no count. Contamination on the steel box would not rub off but seemed to be imbedded in the pores of the metal. The sand removed from the steel door was free from contamination but contamination in the amount of 15,000 c/m could be found along the top of the door where it fitted against the concrete. The door had a felt seal and some felt was hanging loose as a result of the blast, and this felt gave a reading of approximately 30,000 c/m.

The door was supported by three hinges, with five bolts holding the hinges on the door side. Two bolts nearest the edge of the door on the top hinge had been sheared by the blast and the door forced out on all sides to make the door bind, which made opening the door very difficult. The handle controlling the latch on the door turned without too much difficulty but we found later that the handle turned without the latch completely lifting from the bracket. All shoring in the shaft was decayed from dry rot and couldn't be used as bracing to jack open the door, so new 8"x8" timbers were used as extra shoring and as a base for a 15-ton jack which was placed against the door. After bending a jack handle, we decided the jack was too light for the job before us. The 15-ton jack was removed and a 50-ton jack was used without success. Additional 8"x8" timbers were set up and two 50-ton jacks were used against the door and the door began to open. Only two personnel were permitted in the pit during the operation of opening the door and these were Laboratory personnel. They were equipped with full protective clothing, including Chemox masks, and plastic hoods over the head and shoulders. As the door was opened inch by inch, the area around the door was monitored and the count began to go up very rapidly. It was very damp around the room and drops of water and white mold could be seen on all the ledges. Everyone had been very concerned about the dust problem when the room was to be entered, but with so much condensation on the concrete, the Po was sticking to the surface very well. On April 11, 1952, when the room was finally opened, Henry Petrzilka and the writer entered the room. It was covered with twisted metal and all the equipment was battered and tossed

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