SDMS DOCID# 1145342

Record of Communication
N. Rivelandther, EPA
May 9, 1995 11:00 Am

re: Verdese Carter Park Site

FX-6 Personal Privacy [redacted]

Visited FX-6 [redacted] at his home (above address) to discuss his former employment at the Electric Auto-Lite Battery plant in Oakland. He stated that he worked for the company for FX-6 yrs. and retired FX-6 [redacted] ago. He is FX-6 years old.

When I told him that I wanted to talk about the Oakland plant he said that he has been watching the news and saw that the residents in the neighborhood were claiming that their children have been getting sick due to the contamination at the park (VCP). He said he felt that was incorrect. He said the workers at the plant who were exposed at higher levels & on a daily basis hardly ever got sick, so how coned these children be getting sick when they have only be living in the area after the plant was gone & by only playing in the park (after it had been cleaned up).

He stated that he felt the most risk to the community was from the oxide mill. He said the oxide mill contained one smoke stack, ~100 feet tall and this was where they would add oxygen to the lead in order to turn it into a powder. This in turn would then go to the pasting dept to be turned into paste, which would then be formed into plates and go into the batteries.

The oxide mill was in operation until ~5 years prior to the closure of the plant (~1970). The company then purchased the lead oxide from outside sources.

FX-6 stated that on occasion he could see the smoke (brownish dust) coming from the smoke stack (oxide mill) while he was driving to work. He said this was how they knew that the bags (filters - ~ like a vacuum bag) needed to be replaced. FX-6 said the smoke stack had ~16 bags and that the engineering dept was in charge of making sure the filters were still working. The smoke stack was ~100 feet tall and the wind carried the lead dust in various directions. He thought that the prevailing wind blew towards Bancroft, but he couldn't be sure. He said he remembered seeing the lead dust on surrounding rooftops & on the greenhouses of the nursery that was next door. FX-6 said he was surprised that ~~[illegible]~~ none of the neighbors complained about the smoke & subsequent lead dust. Oxide mill was 24 hr operation.

FX-6 said that the plant was built sometime in the 1920's. He said it was just dairy farms there when the plant was built & that the houses came later. He said he went to work at the plant in 19FX-6 when he was FX-6 yrs. old. He said when he started working there, the school was already built (across the street from the plant). FX-6 said he worked at the Oakland

plant itself for FX-6 years + that it kept him out of serving in the military because plant mgmt was able to convince the government that FX-6 was more valuable to the war effort working at the plant instead of being drafted.

FX-6 said that he no longer worked out of Oakland ~ FX-6 years prior to the plant closing down. When the plant closed down in the mid-1970's, they built a new, upgraded facility in Visalia. At this time, he was involved in FX-6 work out of the FX-6 is FX-6 Personal Privacy

FX-6 said that the plant wanted to stay in Oakland + make upgrades to the facility, but that the city of Oakland wanted them out and ∴ wouldn't approve any of the upgrades. FX-6 said that the company sold the property to Oakland for $1.

FX-6 recalled that there were inspections and samples taken periodically by some regulator - FX-6 thought it was OSHA (RWQCB ?). He said that the regulator would take water samples from their pipes that went to the public sewer system + that the regulator said it was OK (even though it was highly acidic due to all of the sulfuric acid that was used in the battery mfg business) because it would be neutralized by a fruit canning plant that was upgradient & was emitting caustic solutions to the drainage system.

When asked about the corporate successorship of the company, FX-6 stated that it used to be called Electric-Autolite Co. They supplied batteries for automotive / trucks / commercial / + military purposes. He said that the company was the sole supplier of batteries to Ford Motor Co. for 21 years. At some point, Electric Autolite sold the "Auto-Lite" name to Ford Motor Co. for $30 million. The company was then called Prestolite + was under the Eltra Corp. They were called Prestolite when the Oakland plant closed. He said Allied Signal then purchased Eltra Corp. FX-6 stated that he currently receives his pension checks from Allied-Signal.

FX-6 said that the company, at their peak, was building about 3000 batteries per day. During wartime, ~100% of batteries were built for the military. At this time, they were building ~1000 batteries / day (bigger, more expensive batteries for airplanes / trucks).

FX-6 said that the plant produced both wet charged + dry charged batteries. FX-6 FX-6 Personal Privacy 2 patents FX-6 FX-6 for processes to make FX-6 batteries. FX-6 patented process made it much cheaper to produce FX-6 batteries (had to do with the method / process of getting the electrical charge). The difference between wet + dry batteries was when the sulfuric acid was added to the battery. For a wet battery, the sulfuric acid is added immediately.

The problem with wet batteries was since the acid is added when they are built, the batteries then have a limited shelf life. The dry batteries, on the other hand, could sit on the shelf for a longer time period because the acid wouldn't be added until the time of the battery's use (or sale).

FX-6 [redacted] stated there was more of a "lead hazard" in the production of dry charged batteries. This is because there are a lot more steps or processes involved + ∴ more lead dust be created with the handling of the lead plates.

FX-6 [redacted] stated that there were ~12 or so sumps located in various locations throughout the plant. The main sump has located in the pasting dept (which was located next to the lead casting area). This sump was ~ 2-3' wide × 16' long and would have an outlet for eliminating the water/sulfuric acid which was ~10" below floor level. When washing down the lead plates/grids/etc. this mixture of lead dust, water + sulfuric acid would drain into the sumps. At this point, the lead would drop to the bottom + the liquid would float on top. They would pump out the liquid + then have the lead "mud" remaining. This "mud" would then be scraped out (~ 1/wk.) + would be put into (10-12) drums + then sent to the smelter. The water/acid solution would go down the drainage system. FX-6 [redacted] mentioned that the company needed to frequently repair/replace their pipes because the acid was eating away at the pipes.

FX-6 [redacted] said that in the early days of his employment (the FX-6 Personal Privacy [redacted]), there were really no worker protective equipment / clothing. He said he feels that the way he kept from "getting leaded" (high levels of lead in blood) was his good hygiene habits. He said he was very careful about washing his hands during the day while at work and showering at home. He said many workers were very careless; they would take breaks and smoke cigarettes without first washing their hands. FX-6 [redacted] said that even in the early days, ~~they~~ the company had nurses taking blood samples from the workers to test for lead blood levels. He said his levels were always low for lead. The company also always made milk available to workers.

FX-6 [redacted] said it was not until sometime in the 19FX-6 [redacted] or 19FX-6 [redacted] when the company started to require workers who worked in the high lead hazard areas (dry plate area / oxide mill / pasting area) to wear coveralls. Respirators were also made available. When OSHA came in (~1970(?)), the company installed a suction + ventilation system. They would have workers constantly walking thru the plant vacuuming any lead dust because it would be put into drums + sent to the smelter (for $). Therefore, any fugitive dust was a potential source of money + was not to be wasted.

FX-6 Personal Privacy [redacted]

FX-6 Personal Privacy [redacted] He said he basically

worked in every dept except the oxide mill area. He said he was glad he never had to work there because it was a high lead hazard area.

FX-6 Personal Privacy

[redacted]

FX-6 [redacted] stated that the company had 37 plants in US + Canada + that the Oakland plant was the smallest. Other plants (e.g. Reading, PA) made up to 12,000 batteries/day. He said the Oakland plant averaged ~ 160 employees. When the plant closed down, operations were moved to the new plant in Visalia. FX-6 [redacted] said that no employees from Oakland went to Visalia because the company didn't want there to be a union at the new plant. The workers belonged to the auto workers union due to their status as a supplier to the Ford Motor Co. The Visalia plant has subsequently been sold to Gould National and is still in operation today.

FX-6 [redacted] stated that the operation of making batteries required the use of alot of water. Therefore, the company had 2 216' wells + pumped out their own water. It would have been too expensive

to use city water.

FX-6 said that the lead would be delivered in 125-150 lbs "pigs" + it would be 100% pure lead for use in the oxide mill. Lead alloyed would also be used for the smaller parts (terminals/grids). These would all arrive at the receiving dept + the pure lead would go into a big mixer/grinder to be ground up + then feed into the oxide mill (w/O_2) so that it could be made into lead paste.

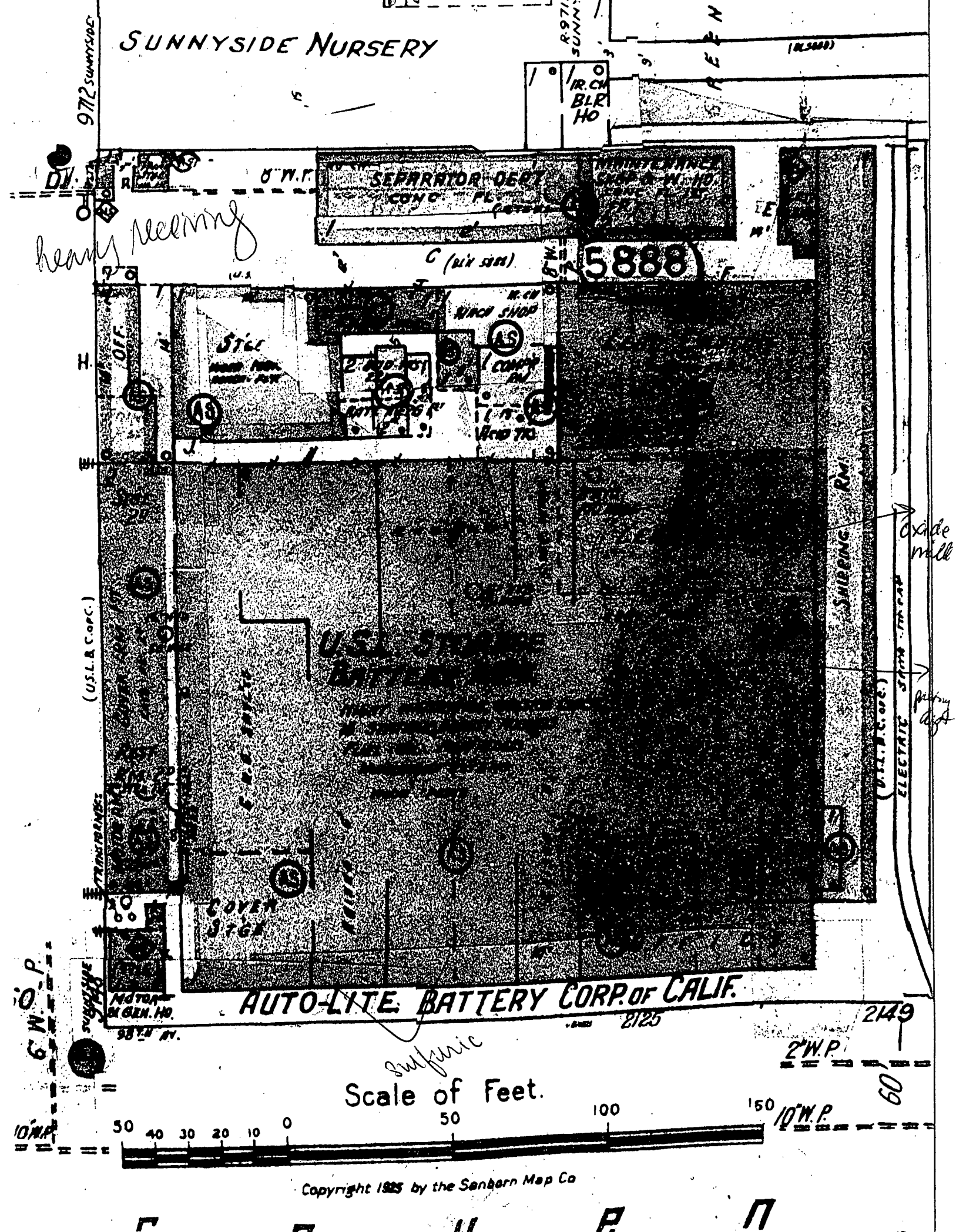
FX-6 said he was not surprised that there was lead found in the soil after the plant moved out because the lead + the acid would spill + get through the cracks of the floor. He said that occasionally they would have to repair the floor + would lift up 1" thick tiles + would find under the floor a cottage cheese appearance. He attributed this to the acid eating away at the floor. This would all be dug up and then sent to the dumps.

FX-6 said that the battery plant did receive defective batteries back from Ford that would either be repaired or scraped + sent to the smelter. They used the lead smelter that was in Crockett, CA. FX-6 said that the plant shipped ~1500 batteries/day to Ford + each battery had a 90 day guarantee. If the battery failed, Ford would send them back to plant to be replaced.

When asked about other employees that I could talk to, FX-6 [redacted] said that very few were still around. FX-6 Personal Privacy [redacted]

FX-6 Personal Privacy [redacted]

FX-6 Personal Privacy [redacted] he had worked in the oxide mill area & could probably give me more information on the mill. FX-6 [redacted] said it would be OK to call him again, if necessary.



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