

HealthLink

Linking Health and the Environment

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Salem Harbor Power Station

Salem, MA

Incident log - collected from neighbors, newspapers, observations, reports, and workers

2002

Weeks after taking office Massachusetts Governor Romney visits the Salem. "I will not create jobs or hold jobs that kill people," Romney said. "And that plant — that plant kills people."

2007

Jan. 22 – Correspondence from Dominion to EPA regarding a COM Malfunction Notification Dec 1-2, 2006.

Nov. 6 - Salem Harbor Station steam turbine boiler in Unit No. 3 explodes. Three workers are killed. Department of Public Safety Report cites years of ash buildup, corrosion, improper inspection, operation and maintenance as the cause. Plant to shut down for 6 months.

Nov. 19 – MA Department of Public Safety revokes certificates of inspection for all 4 boilers.

November – ISO-NE noted “Salem Harbor units were needed until recently for North Shore reliability” also noting that “some portion” of the Salem Harbor output is needed at present to maintain reserves for the larger “Boston Import Area” and that replacement capacity could substitute for Salem Harbor.

2008

March – More than 100 outside contractors clean up main plant building after explosion, which was covered with debris and asbestos-laced fly ash. (Salem News 3/29/08)

May 4 – Sparks from a welding torch start two small fires inside a boiler at the Salem Harbor Station. Sparks ignite a platform plank; an ember falls to the ground and starts a second fire in some construction debris. Firefighters knock down the debris fire but getting to the initial fire was more taxing.

May 13 – OSHA cites Salem plant in workers’ deaths – “failed to take effective steps to protect employees against the hazards ... of a ruptured or leaking boiler tubes and piping.”

July 24 – Dominion of Virginia, power plant owners, restarts the 1957 boiler in Unit No. 3 (after Nov. 2007 explosion) without any inspection by the Dept. of Environmental Protection.

July 25 – Dominion is quoted in Salem News, “Salem Harbor Station to run for years to come.”

July 31 – In wake of the explosion, the Department of Public Safety releases the incident report following inspection and review of safety procedures at the plant identifying eight contributing factors:

- 1) Failure to inspect and maintain the “dead air space” of the boiler for a period of nine years or more;
- 2) Failure of the insurance inspector to inspect the dead air space annually;

- 3) Improper delegation to unlicensed personnel;
- 4) Failure to implement the boiler condition assessment and life extension program;
- 5) Failure to recognize existing plant hazards;
- 6) Improper boiler maintenance practices;
- 7) Improper plant personnel operating practice;
- 8) Failure of boiler operators to identify leak prior to the catastrophic failure.

Pictures from the report reveal a boiler covered in ash and beneath the ash, substantial corrosion. Commissioner of Public Safety Thomas Gatzunis called the failure to inspect "incompetence."

Nov. 7 - A pressurized steam release from the plant in the early morning hours, emitting what was described as a frightening sonic blast lasting up to 5 minutes, sends a citywide emergency responders to the plant.

Nov. 12 - Chemical spill at plant exposes workers to vapors from bromide, hydrobromic acid, chlorine and HCL and sends six to hospital.

Dec. 12 – Ruptured pipe at plant, leaks gallons of thick diesel oil into Salem Harbor. Power plant workers cast booms to contain spill.

2009

January – Many complaints of opaque and dirty emissions as well as night time plumes lead HealthLink to launch Plant Watch Rapid Repose Team to document concerns. 'Watchers' photograph dirty plumes which are placed in a slide show on the HealthLink website. DEP and other officials visit plant several times after viewing photographs.

January – Quarterly Excess Emission Reports (2006-2008) – EACH QUARTER documents cases when the transgressions of the emissions limits occur, largely if not entirely, opacity problems.

Feb. 5 – Letter from Dominion transmits the results of mercury emissions. Hg results for Unit 3 has a rate of 0.011 lb/GW hr. – greater than the allowable rate of .0075 lb/GW hr. for all units.

Feb. 24 – Dominion summarizes emissions for SO₂ for 2007 and 2008 in reports, emphasizing 'compound' emission rates for combining the emissions from the Brayton Point and Salem Harbor Station, treating the two plants as one.

March 2 - EPA: "Salem Harbor Station #3 polluter in state." (Salem News)

March 17 - Coal offloading mishap blankets neighborhood with black grimy coal dust. Dominion places car wash coupons on windshields. Photos placed on HealthLink website slide show.

April - Reports of tube malfunction of boiler in Unit No. 2; no harm to workers. Workers reported to be on edge.

May 21 – Governor Patrick attends citizens forum in Marblehead and reveals he has been in talks with Dominion and "We will have something to say in a couple of weeks." (Salem News)

June – Reports of city garden plots in vicinity of power plant being inspected to be sure nothing edible is grown in contaminated soil.

July – Reports of skeletal crew running facility. Unidentified source tells HealthLink, only 3 workers at plant in evening. (unconfirmed)

July 7 - Night navigation lights on the tall stack are out (7/4). This is reported to the plant. On Sunday (7/6) lights are still out and is reported to the FAA. Within 10 minutes they are fixed. On Monday (7/7) the day lights are out. Again this is reported to the FAA. They are on in 1 hour.

July 8 – HealthLink sends letter to Governor and organizes a call-in asking that he reveal his ‘secret announcement’ about the power plant as stated when visiting Marblehead on May 21.

July 18 – A stuck valve results in a ‘deafening’ pressurized steam release lasting 10 minutes, jarring neighbors and sending emergency responders and police to the plant. Billowing steam appears, not from stacks, but from building itself. [This raises concerns about fly ash and asbestos exposure to workers.] Police were told ‘there was no problem.’

November 6 – EPA and Coast Guard are alerted to chemical mishap at the plant whereby 46,000 gallons of EDTA (cleaning chemical) was mistakenly pumped into the urea tank (used for NOx control). Remediation by Clean Harbors.

November 9 - Report by observer that ‘the boilers start around 7:00 pm and send a plume out for about 12 hours while the boiler is coming up to temperature. This happened last Thursday night into Friday morning. They always start the boilers at night to hide the plume and they seem to be cycling the boilers now weekly.’

2010

January 27 - Conservation Law Foundation files an intent to sue Dominion for violation of the Federal Clean Air Act. Opacity violations occurred 286 times between 2005 – 2009. CLF will also seek fines against Dominion for the times the opacity monitors were offline or in disrepair not recording opacity.

January – Pollution photos added almost daily to the slide show.

March 3 – Citizen report : “Almost every day, usually in the morning there is a loud, deep thrumming sound that come across Salem harbor to our Naugus neighborhood. It is impossible to sleep through even with ear plugs. There is sometimes another loud droning sound, like a giant excavator, alone or in addition to it. It is such a nuisance that we are beginning to regret our decision to move here. It’s been happening since September or thereabouts.”