



SYNTRUM CORPORATION REMOVAL SITE

U. S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY • REGION 9 • SAN FRANCISCO • APRIL 1998

Los Angeles County, CA

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed this fact sheet to inform the public about activities currently underway at the Syntrum Corporation removal site in Los Angeles County, California. An EPA *removal* involves actions taken quickly to mitigate a potentially dangerous environmental situation. At the Syntrum site, EPA's Emergency Response capabilities have been activated due to the imminent and substantial endangerment of human health and the environment presented by this site.

The Site

The Syntrum Corporation is located at 13125 South Broadway in a light industrial area of Los Angeles County (see map this page). The company is a chemical research, development and manufacturing laboratory that incorporated Carbon 14 into organic compounds. Carbon 14 is a radioactive isotope of carbon that emits low energy beta radiation; it is used in chemical research. Other activities at the Syntrum Corporation involved experimental organic synthesis and antiviral drug research.

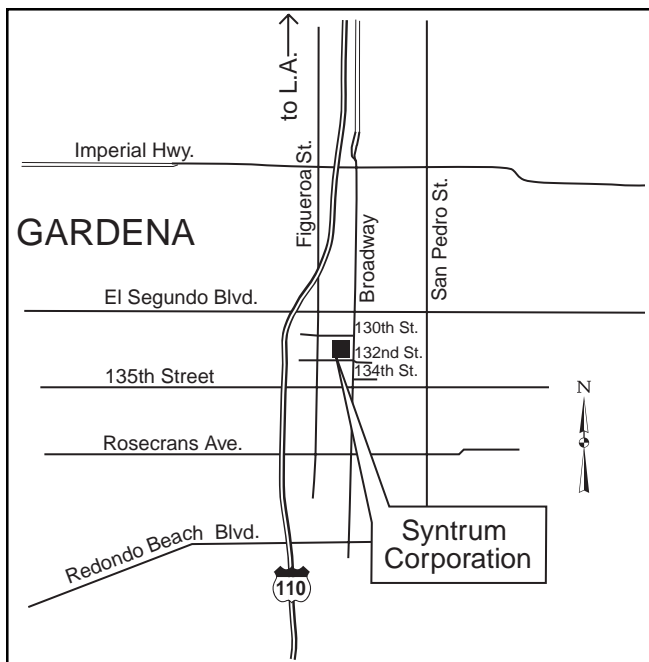
How EPA Got Involved

In August 1997, there was a fire and explosion at the facility. When the Los Angeles County Fire Department (LAFD) responded, they found the building's sprinkler system had flooded the facility and caused Car-

bon 14-contaminated runoff into the streets. With such unsafe conditions existing at the site, LAFD shut down the facility for all activities other than cleanup. Shortly thereafter, the California Department of Health Services Radiologic Health Branch requested EPA's help, and a thorough assessment of the facility was conducted by EPA's contractor.

What We Found

The Syntrum facility was found to contain thousands of improperly stored chemicals in all hazard classes: oxidizers, corrosives, poisons, flammable liquids, water reactives, flammable solids, air reactives and radioactive sources. The laboratory ventilation system was sampled and found to contain radioactive contamination in excess of established guidance limits for Carbon 14. A dumpster at the facility contained radioactive chemicals and other chemical residue. (This dumpster has since been moved to a secured area within the building.) Typical background counts for Carbon 14 in the area is 42 counts per minute (cpm). The residue in the dumpster read 8,000 cpm; one chemical container read 88,648 cpm.



Location of Syntrum Corporation removal site

Threat to Human Health and the Environment

Conditions at the Syntrum Corporation constitute a threat to the health and welfare of both humans and the environment. Improper chemical storage at the Syntrum site could result in a spontaneous chemical reaction, fire or explosion that could release radioactive contamination. Substances emitting beta radiation can cause skin and eye damage in humans through contact and internal damage if injected or inhaled. For these reasons, EPA's request for removal funds was quickly approved.

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What EPA is Doing

The first steps in dealing with the hazards at the Syntrum site are to perform a radiological survey and comprehensive inventory of the substances on site, sort and classify all materials and decontaminate chemical containers. This is currently being done. Following this, all hazardous substances will be prepared for proper transportation to and disposal at a permitted facility or, where feasible, treatment or recycling. Finally, the laboratory building itself will be decontaminated through physical removal of contamination and/or the washing of contaminated areas. It is estimated that this cleanup of the Syntrum facility will take four months.

History of Violations

This present removal action at the Syntrum site is not the first contact EPA has had with environmental problems at this company. In 1987, EPA conducted an emergency

cleanup of California Bionuclear in Sun Valley, California. California Bionuclear is the former business name of the Syntrum Corporation prior to its relocation to the present Los Angeles address. EPA's action at that time was prompted by a LAFD fire inspection in August 1985 which revealed improper storage of flammable liquids, incompatible materials, reactive materials and radioactive materials at the site. A Notice of Violation (NOV) was issued to California Bionuclear to correct these problems. A reinspection of the facility in January 1986 revealed that none of the previous violations had been corrected. As a result of this and other activities, EPA's assistance was requested by the Los Angeles Deputy District Attorney in August 1986.

In June 1997, the LAFD Health and Hazardous Materials Division issued a NOV to the Syntrum Corporation for improperly managing their hazardous materials. A second NOV was issued less than one

month later for additional violations. Syntrum's radioactive materials license allowing for the possession and handling of Carbon 14 expired in March 1996 and was never renewed. After the August 1997 fire at the facility which indicated the continued presence of Carbon 14, the California Department of Health Services issued its NOV to Syntrum. The primary owner of the Syntrum Corporation did not respond adequately to this NOV and, as a result, was issued an Order to Divest of all radioactive materials. Syntrum was given 15 days to submit a decommissioning plan and an additional 15 days after plan approval to begin decommissioning operations. The owner requested a public hearing on the Order but did not appear at the hearing. To date, the owner has failed to comply with any provisions of the Order. The Los Angeles County District Attorney's office has filed criminal charges against the owner of the Syntrum Corporation.

For More Information

If you have questions or concerns regarding the cleanup activities taking place at the Syntrum Corporation site, please contact:

Dan Suter
On-scene Coordinator
U.S. EPA
75 Hawthorne (SFD-6)
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 744-2297

Vicki Rosen
Community Involvement Coordinator
U.S. EPA
75 Hawthorne St. (SFD-3)
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 744-2187

You may also call either of the above EPA staff toll-free at **(800) 231-3075**.