

Warhead in Truck Accident in NE [news article, 12/16]

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Subject: Warhead in Truck Accident in NE [news article, 12/16]

[Thanks to J.H. Re: earlier posting regarding nuke transport.]

Warhead in Truck Accident

Monday, December 16, 1996 1:30 pm EST

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) -- A government truck carrying nuclear warheads overturned on a remote stretch of highway, but no radioactive material was released, Nebraska's two U.S. senators confirmed. The public was not informed at the time of the accident.

The truck overturned Nov. 16 after hitting a patch of ice left by a storm, and Sen. Bob Kerrey said today that the two warheads should not have been transported during such poor weather.

Kerrey said the U.S. Department of Energy should have immediately notified the public of the accident.

There was no danger of a nuclear explosion, Sen. Jim Exon told the Omaha World-Herald.

The truck overturned on highway U.S. 83 near Brownlee in the Sandhill country of north-central Nebraska, about 40 miles north of Valentine.

Exon, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, was told of the accident that night, but told the World-Herald on Sunday that he did not issue a statement then because there appeared to be no problem at the site.

Exon did not return a call today to The Associated Press.

Nebraska Gov. Ben Nelson told the World-Herald he did not know about the shipment.

Energy Department officials have said nuclear weapons are moved in unmarked tractor-trailer rigs that are heavily fortified with safety equipment. Every truck is accompanied by at least two vehicles carrying armed guards and the convoys' locations are tracked by satellite.

Bill Arkin, a nuclear weapons expert and columnist for the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, told The Denver Post he suspected the warheads were being shipped from Minot, N.D., to the Pantex nuclear weapons plant in Texas.

The Minot Air Force Base has 150 Minuteman III missile silos and a fleet of B-52 bombers. Pantex, near Amarillo, assembles, maintains and retires nuclear weapons.

A spokesman for the U.S. Department of Energy's Transportation Safeguards Division in Albuquerque, N.M., offered little information.

``All I can say is that the cargo was intact. It was a classified cargo,'' said spokesman Al Stotts.

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