

EARLY THERMAL TESTING OF TYPE B RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL PACKAGES IN THE US TO ENVIRONMENTS BEYOND THE REGULATORY PACKAGE THERMAL TEST STANDARDS

H. R. Yoshimura*
Sandia National Laboratories
PO Box 5800
Albuquerque, NM 87185

Ronald B. Pope, Consultant
11262 Weatherstone Drive
Waynesboro, PA 17268, USA

M. Kubo
Japan Atomic Energy Agency (JAEA)
4-49, Muramatsu, Naka-gun,
Ibaraki, Japan

ABSTRACT

Three separate fire test programs exposing casks beyond the regulatory thermal test requirements were performed by Sandia National Laboratories during the late-1970s and mid-1980s. The results of these test programs can be used to assist in addressing the adequacy of the regulatory thermal test of fully-engulfing exposure at 800°C for 30 minutes and how that test might relate to real accident thermal environments. The test programs were undertaken on obsolete and new casks on behalf of the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the Japanese Power Reactor and Nuclear Fuel Development Corporation (currently known as the Japan Atomic Energy Agency). Two of the tests involved exposure of casks in damaged transport vehicles to fully engulfing fires for 72 to 125 minutes, and the other test involved four exposures of a cask to torch environments for 30 minutes. Much of the original documentation regarding these tests and their results is no longer readily available. The documents relating to these tests have been surveyed; this paper presents summaries from this survey of the tests and their results. A review of these three thermal test programs establishes that the two older cask designs and one new cask design have the ability to survive environments that were different from (i.e. the torch environments) or more severe than the environment specified by the existing thermal test requirement in the Transport Regulations. These results can be extrapolated to apply to modern casks that generally have more robust designs as well as better quality assurance applied during the manufacturing process. A significantly expanded version of this paper has been published in Vol. 18, No. 2 of the international journal *“Packaging, Transport, Storage & Security of Radioactive Material”*.

INTRODUCTION

When deliberations were undertaken with respect to specifying thermal test requirements in the international Transport Regulations for Type B and Fissile Material Packages, issues that were addressed included the extent of engulfment of the package in a thermal (i.e., a fire) environment, the source temperature of the thermal environment, and the duration of the thermal test^[1]. As summarized in Ref. [1], these deliberations resulted in the current parameters specified in the thermal test requirements in the Transport Regulations. These requirements were first promulgated in the 1964 edition of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material^[2]. They have essentially remained the same with minor textual variations in all editions of the Transport Regulations issued since that time. Since their introduction, concerns have been and often continue to be voiced by users of the regulations and by the public as to the adequacy of these thermal package test standards.

Three separate fire test programs that went beyond the 30-minute, 800°C, fully engulfing thermal test requirements of the IAEA Transport Regulations were performed by Sandia National Laboratories during the late-1970's and mid-1980's. The results of these test programs can assist in addressing the concerns noted above. Two test programs were performed on obsolete casks in the late-1970s, and a test program was undertaken on newly-

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designed test hardware in the mid-1980s. Specifically, these three test programs were as follows: (a) the exposure of an obsolete 67-tonne spent nuclear fuel (SNF) cask located in its 68-tonne transport railcar, the combination of which had been previously impacted at high speed^[3] as part of the DOE's Full Scale Vehicle Test program, to an open pool fire test for 125 minutes^[4,5,6]; (b) the exposure of a 2-tonne mixed-oxide fresh fuel cask located on its transport-trailer that had previously been tested with the motive-power tractor in a 90 km/h (56 mph) head-on impact as part of the DOE/PNC Joint Program on Transportation Technology to an open pool fire test for 72-minutes^[7,8]; and (c) multiple exposures of the 45-tonne obsolete Hallam Nuclear Power Facility (the HNPF reactor closed in 1966) SNF cask, modified to resemble contemporary designs, as part of a DOT-sponsored test program to assess the effects of a hydrocarbon fuel torch fire, where the exposures occurred for a 30-minute duration^[9-11].

Over the years, the results of these thermal test programs have been individually documented in various forms, including summaries at international meetings and in some documents that have received only limited distribution. However, the results of the three disparate programs have never been assembled in a fashion that could be used to assist in effectively demonstrating whether the existing thermal test requirements in the Transport Regulations are, or are not, adequate. The purpose of this paper is to assemble a brief summary of the thermal test programs, using the results therefrom to assist in assessing the adequacy of the regulatory package thermal test standards; and to precede this with a brief summary of the background of deliberations that led to the establishment of the current thermal test requirements in the Transport Regulations.

CASK THERMAL TESTS

Cask Designs Tested

Each of the casks and, as appropriate, the associated transport hardware tested in the fire exposures are briefly described here.

Railcar/Cask Design used in Pool Fire Testing: The obsolete 67-tonne SNF cask, which was designed in the late 1950s and was fabricated in 1962, was of steel/lead construction. It was a stainless steel, double-walled, lead-shielded cylindrical vessel 3.96 m in length and 1.5 m in diameter. The lead was contained in a cylinder between the two stainless steel shells, where the combination of stainless steel and lead provided gamma-shielding of the radiation emanating from the SNF. This early-designed cask utilized an auxiliary water cooling system of stainless steel channels welded to the outside of the inner shell of the cask body. The cooling system was provided not for safety purposes, but for facilitating rapid handling of the cask and its contents after shipment. Also, copper fins were welded to the inside of the outer shell to facilitate heat transfer from the lead to the outer shell. The cask, which is shown photographically prior to the fire test in Figure 1, had previously been impacted in its transport railcar into a massive barrier at 131 km/h^[3]. As can be seen from Figure 1, the cask sustained only "cosmetic" damage as a result of this dynamic structural test; there was only minor bending of the external heat transfer fins.

Truck/Cask Design used in Pool Fire Test: A special nuclear material (SNM) package (i.e., a 2-tonne mixed-oxide breeder reactor fresh fuel cask) was designed by PNC during the early 1980s. The design of the transport system was intended to allow up to three of these packages to be transported in a tractor/trailer road vehicle domestically in Japan. The DOE/PNC Joint Program included a full-scale simulated accident test of a head-on collision of three of the casks in their tractor/trailer conveyance impacting a massive concrete barrier at a speed of 90 km/h. This impact accident-simulation test was followed by testing one of the casks to the regulatory 9 m drop test of the cask onto an unyielding target, and then to the regulatory 1 m puncture test onto a probe mounted on the unyielding target. Finally the impacted cask/transport system, using the cask that had been tested three times along with the two casks that had only been involved in the simulated impact crash, was exposed to a fully-engulfing fuel fire for one hour. This paper only addresses the one-hour fire test of the cask/transport system. The cask tested is shown photographically in Figure 2 and schematically in Figure 3. The cask had sustained only minor structural damage during the series of mechanical tests that preceded the thermal test. The cask design consisted of thin concentric steel shells; the annular spaces were filled with balsa wood. Although the cask had sustained some deformation (up to approximately 5 cm deep), the inner lid and seals were still intact. The cask was relocated into the tested trailer for the thermal test.

Cask Design used in the Torch Tests: The cask selected for the torch tests, was a design that had been retired from service, which had been fabricated in 1967 for the transport of SNF from the HNPF. It consisted of an inner cylindrical shell of stainless steel, an annulus of lead to provide gamma shielding, and an outer carbon steel cylindrical shell. With changes that had occurred in the design, testing, and operational regulatory requirements for such casks, the HNPF cask could no longer be utilized; it was lacking adequate neutron shielding and adequate

impact limiting capability. In order to test a cask system that more closely resembled contemporary casks, a neutron shield was added to the cylindrical outer shell of the cask and impact limiters were added to the ends of the cask. The resulting cask is shown schematically in Figure 4, which illustrates the locations where the torch was applied during testing.

Test Facilities, Environments and Instrumentation

Pool Fire Test Facility: A fuel pool was constructed specifically for the rail car/cask test. It measured 0.9-m deep, 9.1-m wide and 18.3-m long. JP-4 (jet) fuel was continuously piped into the pool to maintain a 15-cm layer of fuel above 60-cm of water. The cask/railcar combination was reassembled over the large fuel pool, supported on concrete pedestals. The cask/railcar and the wheel trucks that had become disengaged during the preceding impact test were positioned as they had been following the impact with the barrier as shown in Figure 5. Extensive thermocouple monitoring of the flame and the cask was undertaken during the test. The thermal-shielded “trees” for the thermocouples leading from the edge of the pool into the cask can be seen in Figure 5.

The fuel pool that had been used for the railcar/cask pool fire test was also used for the truck/cask pool fire test. The casks that – as described previously – had been exposed to the structural tests were relocated into the tested trailer, and cask/trailer system was then positioned over the fuel pool as shown in Figure 6, for the thermal test. The trailer included the sides and the top of 0.8 cm thick mild steel plating; however, because the front end of the trailer was severely damaged in the impact test, it was fully removed for the thermal test. One tear occurred in the trailer deck during the impact test, which showed a weakness in the design and the design was corrected for actual use to prevent such damage from happening in an actual accident. Therefore the tear in the deck was repaired prior to the thermal test. The thermal characteristics of the fire and the thermal response of the cask and trailer during the fire test were monitored with 106 thermocouples. This included monitoring temperatures inside the cask, on the cask and trailer surfaces, on towers located at the four corners of the trailer, and on 21 calorimeters. The details of the locations and measurements taken are provided in Reference 8.

Cask Torch Test Facility: The torch tests ^[9 - 11] were performed at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology/ Ballistics Research Laboratory (BRL) Torch Facility in Socorro, New Mexico, USA. The design characteristics of the torch include a 1204 °C flame temperature at the point of discharge, 1.22 m impinging flame diameter, 3.7 m distance between the torch point of discharge and the cask, and a 30-minute exposure time^[12]. Four tests to different exposure conditions were performed. The four exposure conditions were: (a) side of the cask at the centre with the neutron shield filled with water, with the torch impinging perpendicular to the axis of the cask; (b) side of the cask near the closure (i.e., seal) end with the neutron shield filled with water, with the torch impinging perpendicular to the axis of the cask; (c) opposite side of the cask at the centre with the neutron shield voided of water, with the torch impinging perpendicular to the axis of the cask; and (d) directly on the impact limiter at the head end (i.e. closure end), with the torch impinging parallel to the axis of the cask. Temperature and pressure data were collected during both the heating and cool-down phases, for a total of 90 minutes. Temperatures were measured in the torch, at the external surface of the cask, and at various internal locations in the cask including the neutron shield water, the outer carbon steel cylindrical shell, and the inner stainless steel shell. The details of the locations and measurements taken are available in published documents ^[9 - 11].

Test Results

Railcar/Cask Pool Fire Test: Prior to undertaking this test, it was agreed that the test would continue beyond the regulatory 30-minute requirement until damage to the cask was detected. Such detection would depend upon measured temperatures of the cask and visual observations. Once the pool fire was ignited, the cask and railcar generally remained engulfed in the fire; although during minor wind gusts (fluctuating between 0 and 2 km/h) parts of the structure would momentarily be exposed from the flames, as shown in Figure 7. Despite these difficulties, average flame temperatures at different locations in the fire ranged from 980°C to 1200°C ^[5], well above the regulatory 800°C value.

During approximately the first 90 minutes of the test, the cask experienced a relatively mild temperature response. After 90 minutes the rate of temperature rise increased more rapidly. At approximately 100 minutes, a white cloud of smoke, determined to be lead oxide, was visually detected emanating from the cask. At this time the supply of fuel to the pool was terminated, but the fire continued to burn until all fuel was consumed. Due to the weakening of the concrete and metal supports and the metal railcar, at approximately 122 minutes the railcar still containing the cask toppled onto its side, severing all thermocouple connections. The fire self-extinguished at 125 minutes. The final position of the railcar/cask following fire exposure is shown in Figure 8.

Figure 9 depicts the cask from a top view (the cask was positioned with its axis horizontal), showing the general wind direction and the maximum measured surface temperature at various locations. Temperatures were higher on the top than on the bottom, and on the windward side than on the leeward side.

A detailed assessment of the results of this thermal test is provided in Ref. 5. This included summarizing both pre-test predictions and post-test modelling; the latter performed with a view to obtaining a better understanding of the parameters involved in such fire exposures. This paper concluded that “*the computer analysis of this test configuration proved to be difficult, not because of the cask model, but because of the definition of the boundary conditions.*” The effects of variations with time of the absorptivity of the cask and the reduction of heat input to the cask from intervening structure were addressed in these analyses. The paper concluded that the “*present regulatory criteria appear to properly account for the wide range of environments a package might be exposed to in a severe accident.*”

A thorough post-mortem inspection of the tested cask was also undertaken ^[13] to assess the modes of failure resulting from this extensive thermal exposure. The results of this assessment are provided in Ref. 13.

Truck/Cask Pool Fire Test: The test was performed at a time which would provide as near-optimal weather conditions as possible. The wind speed varied from 0 to no more than 8 km/h. Once the fuel was ignited, flames quickly engulfed the trailer/cask system. A study of the films of the test showed that, during the 72 minutes of the fire, the system was totally engulfed for 69 minutes (i.e., for 96 percent of the time). The tested system, following termination of the fire exposure is shown in the photograph provided in Figure 10.

Temperatures in the fire were measured and the means of the temperature time averages at four heights in the fire were developed for 30 and 60 minutes for the four locations surrounding the cask/trailer test system. Similarly, the means of the temperature time averages for the cask surface, the cask tie-downs and the trailer were developed for 30 and 60 minutes. The means of the temperature time averages are summarized in Table 1. The data in Table 1 illustrate that:

- (a) the mean flame temperatures in the areas surrounding the cask/trailer test system were consistently on the order of 1000 to 1050°C, well above the 800°C required by the regulatory test standards;
- (b) the mean flame temperatures cooled as would be expected at heights well above the location of the cask, to a value of 720°C at a height of 6.1 m;
- (c) the cask surface temperatures varied significantly over the surface as indicated by the standard deviation of these values;
- (d) the trailer temperatures also varied significantly;
- (e) the temperatures of the hardware increased with time; and
- (f) on average, the trailer was hotter than the cask and the cask was hotter than the tie-downs at any given time.

The front end of the cask tended to heat faster than the rear of the cask, because the front end of the trailer had been removed following its damage in the preceding impact test. This fully exposed the front end of the cask directly to the fire environment. The maximum mean axial temperatures for the cask were 870°C at the front of the cask, decreasing to 660°C at the center of the cask, and then increasing somewhat to 759°C at the back of the cask.

Table 1. Mean temperature at various heights in the 72-minute, fully engulfing fire test of the PNC SNM package

Location	Mean of the temperature time average at 30 minutes (°C)	Standard deviation of the temperature time average at 30 minutes (°C)	Mean of the temperature time average at 60 minutes (°C)	Standard deviation of the temperature time average at 60 minutes (°C)
In fire at 2.3 m height	1040	20	1050	6
In fire at 2.9 m height	1050	40	1060	30
In fire at 3.5 m height	1000	40	1010	50
In fire at 6.1 m height	720	90	700	80
Cask surface	440	180	600	170
Cask tie-downs	180	50	370	60
Trailer	750	180	850	140

The cask was examined in detail following exposure to the fire test. It was not possible to remove the outer head of the cask after the thermal test because of structural damage incurred during the preceding impact tests. Thus, the examination included leak rate testing of the seals and physically sectioning the package for visual examination. The results of the examination are as follows:

- (a) The post-fire leak rate test exhibited no detectable leak;
- (b) Temperature sensitive labels on the inner head showed maximum temperatures of only 205°C to 210°C;
- (c) Much of the balsa wood was charred (approximately 90 percent on the upper half and 70 percent in the lower half, with some local areas having been completely charred);
- (d) The maximum surface temperatures of the cask exceeded 600°C, and were thus well above the temperatures measured on the inner head (slightly above 200°C). Thus, the charring of the balsa wood can be viewed as a thermal protective mechanism, creating a low-conductivity porous structure that limited the heat transfer to the cask interior; and
- (e) Since the temperatures at the front of the cask where the trailer was open to the fire were higher than those at the rear of the cask where the trailer walls were intact, it was concluded that the intervening structure of the trailer served as an effective thermal shield.

In summary, it was concluded that the containment integrity of the cask was not impaired by the preceding three impact tests or the subsequent 72 minute fire test.

Cask Torch Tests: A photograph of one of the torch tests is shown in Figure 11.

For the torch tests of the modified HNPF cask, the response at various locations was monitored, and the maximum temperatures in these locations was determined. Table 2 summarizes those results. The temperatures reported in this table are:

- the temperature on the outer shell (T_{os}),
- the temperature within the neutron shield (T_{ns}),
- the temperature on the carbon steel shell between the neutron and gamma shielding (T_{cs}), and
- the temperature on the inner surface of the stainless steel inner containment shell (T_{ic}).

The final two columns in the table show the initial temperature of the inner containment shell, and the maximum temperature rise experienced by the inner containment shell, respectively. The table shows that each test was initiated with a different starting temperature in the cask cavity, ranging from 9°C to 31°C. This resulted from changes in the ambient conditions during the test program, and from residual heat in the cask from preceding tests. These data show that exposure to the torch environment does not significantly threaten the containment system. Specifically: (a) the presence of water in the neutron shield adds thermal mass and allows the heat to be spread throughout the cask structure, limiting temperature rise in the containment system to no more than 53°C; (b) when the neutron shield has been voided, localized heating near the torch impingement area allowed a greater increase in the inner containment system to a maximum of 80°C; and (c) when the torch impinged on the impact limiter, the maximum temperature rise of the inner containment system was only 13°C.

Table 2. Summary of maximum temperatures measured during the torch testing of the modified HNPF cask.

Type of test	Maximum temperature in °C				Initial temperature in °C	Maximum temperature rise in °C
	T_{os}	T_{ns}	T_{cs}	T_{ic}		
Side of cask, neutron shield intact	421	138	127	40	9	31
Side of cask near closure end, neutron shield intact	514	93	88	65	12	53
Opposite side of cask, neutron shield voided	938	492	330	105	25	80
Head on the impact limiter at the head end	974	89	96	44	31	13

From this, and associated analyses ^[14, 15], it was determined that the torch environment was much less severe than the regulatory fully engulfing thermal test. Even if the cask were damaged and the neutron shield were lost, the temperature rise of the inner containment system would still be well within acceptable bounds, and the temperature rise in the neutron shield would not have been sufficient to cause it to release its contents due to overpressure.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

A review of these three thermal test programs, establishes that the two older cask designs and one new cask design that were evaluated have the ability to survive environments that were different from (the torch environments) or more severe than the environment specified by the existing thermal test requirement in the Transport Regulations. These results can be extrapolated to apply to modern casks that generally have more robust designs. From this, it would appear that the existing thermal test requirement in the Transport Regulations provides a very robust

specification for evaluating package designs to many of the environments that could be expected in a transport accident involving fire.

For pool fire exposures, both the railcar/cask and truck/cask tests exposed the casks to longer duration, fully-engulfing fires. The temperatures measured in the flames of both exceeded the flame temperature required by the Transport Regulations; yet the obsolete 67-tonne cask survived at least 90 minutes of exposure without apparent failure, and the Japanese SNM cask survived more than one hour of fire exposure while retaining its containment integrity.

For the exposure of the modified HNPF cask to four different torch environments, the integrity of the containment system was retained, the temperature increase was not sufficient to cause the seals to fail, the pressure within the neutron shield did not increase sufficiently to cause loss of the water shield, and the relative temperature increases within the cask were well within acceptable limits and were well below the values that could be expected if the cask were exposed to the Regulatory thermal test.



Fig. 1. Photograph of the obsolete 67-tonne cask prior to fire test.

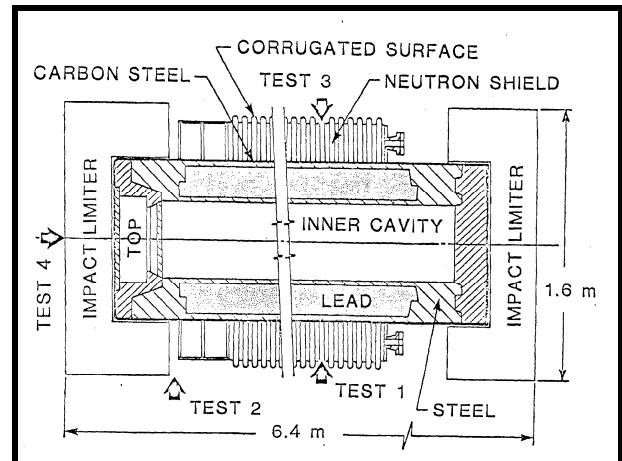


Fig. 4. Schematic of the modified HNPF tested in the torch tests.



Fig. 2. Photograph of the PNC SNM cask and a schematic of its design.

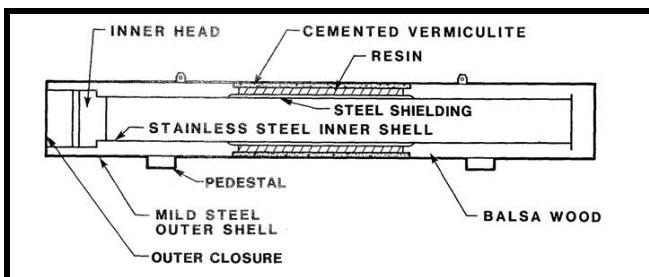


Fig. 3. Schematic of the PNC SNM cask design.

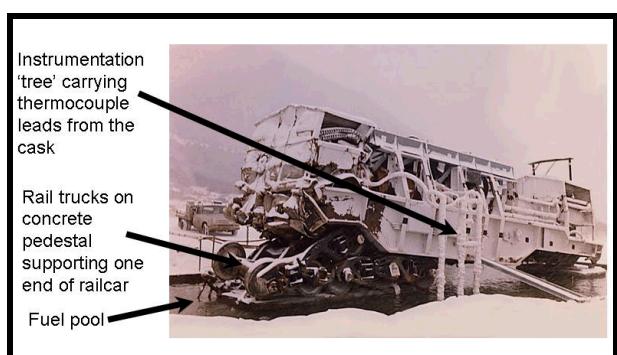


Fig. 5. Cask/railcar assembled over fuel pool prior to testing.



Fig. 6. Placement of SNM cask in tested trailer over fuel pool.

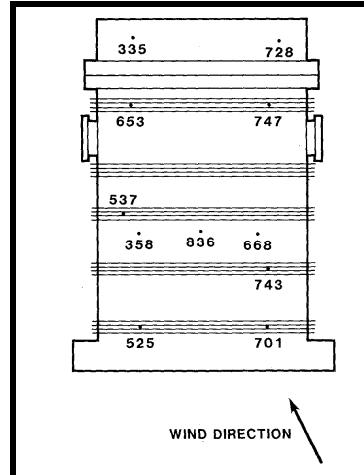


Fig. 9. Schematic of cask showing maximum surface temperatures (in °C) after 60 minutes exposure.

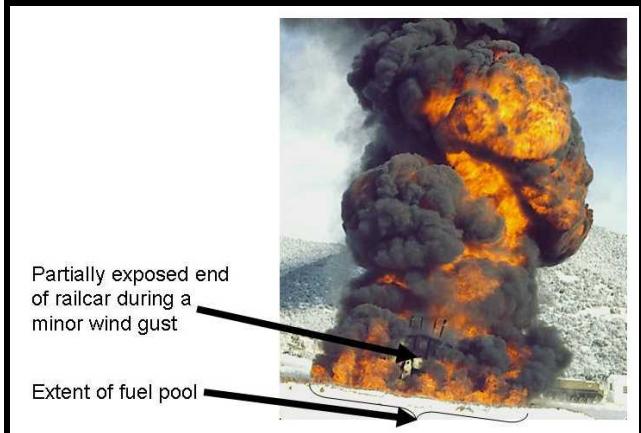


Fig. 7. Cask/Railcar during thermal test.



Fig. 10. Photograph of cask/trailer system following fire exposure.



Fig. 8. Cask/Railcar following exposure to fire for 125 minutes.



Fig. 11. Photograph of modified HNPF cask being exposed to torch environment at the side of the cask in the centre.

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