



A furnace at a nuclear-waste incinerator in southern France exploded Monday, killing one person and injuring four others.

The oven, used to melt low-level radioactive waste, blew up and caught fire, but no radioactive or chemical leaks occurred, said power company Electricite de France SA, whose subsidiary operates the furnace.

Nuclear experts in France were quick to play down the impact of the fire at the facility, whose safety record had previously been questioned by the country's nuclear safety regulator. "There is no chemical or nuclear risk as we speak," said a spokeswoman for French Industry Minister Eric Besson. "It's an industrial accident, not a nuclear accident."

The incinerator burns low-level radioactive waste, such as rubber gloves and metal taps, used in nuclear facilities, said Olivier Isnard, an emergency-management expert at the French Institute for Radioprotection and Nuclear Safety. The fire was quickly extinguished and the building housing the incinerator did not seem to be badly damaged, he said. As a result, the radioactivity level at the site is likely to be "very, very low," said Mr. Isnard.

Socodei, the company that runs the incinerator, is a fully owned subsidiary of EDF. Socodei did not respond to calls seeking comment.

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