

The 1998 TRA 648 Carbon Dioxide Fatality

Michael J. Cates
Research and Education Campus FPE
Idaho National Lab
Battelle Energy Alliance



The Facts

- July 28 1998 Thirteen people entered TRA 648 to begin work on Switchgear.
- At approximately 1800 the CO2 system discharged without warning.
- Five people were overcome and unable to get out.
- Two security guards also responded.



The Facts

- The people who did get out and the guards went back into the building to remove those who could not make it.
- Immediate first aid and CPR was performed by the co-workers and the INL Fire Department. This action **SAVED** lives.
- There was one Fatality – Kerry Austin

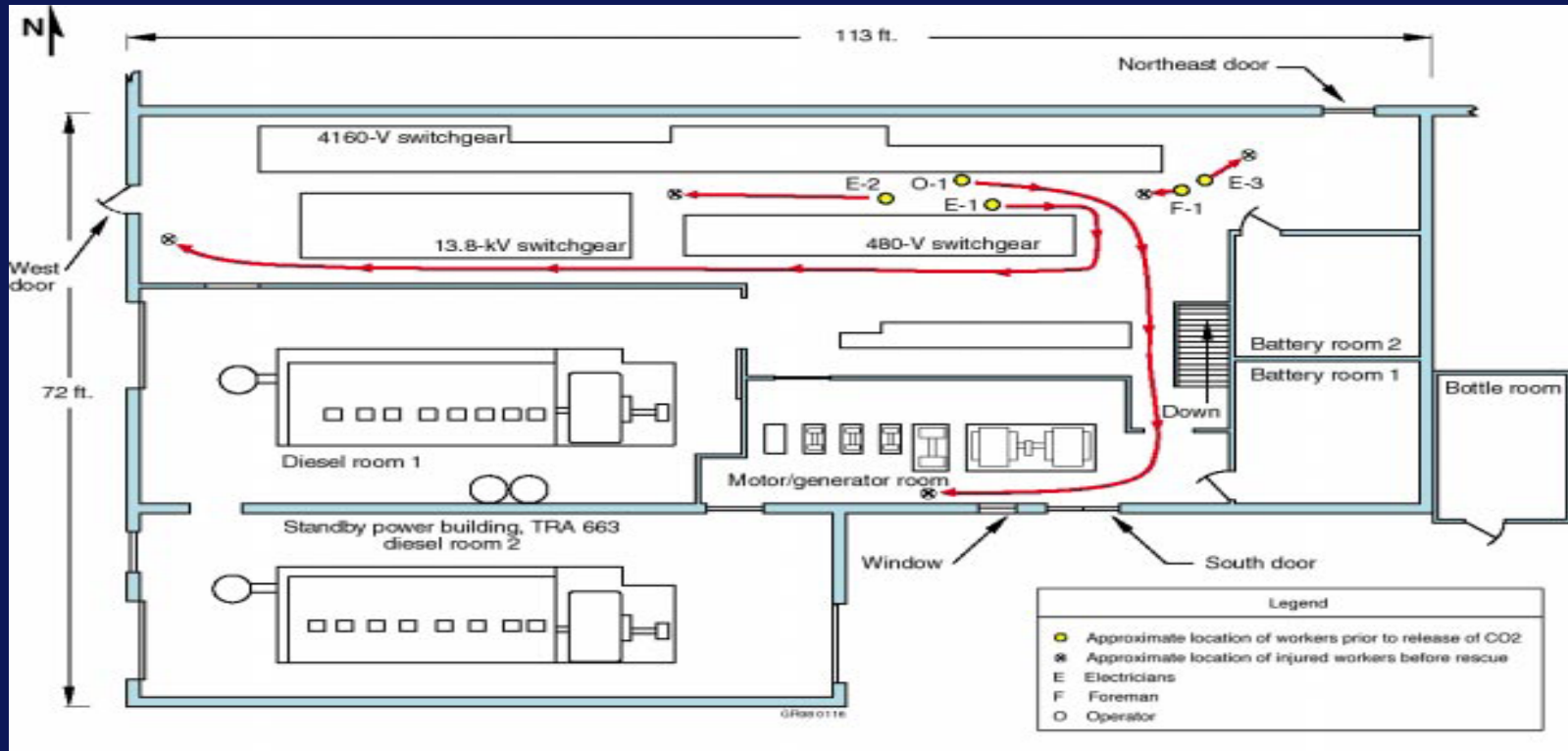


The Facts

- This accident was caused by “Technical Arrogance”.
- The fire alarm panel had a design defect which caused the activation of the output circuits to the solenoids, bypassing the pre-discharge warning, following the loss of power (120 volt AC)



TRA 648 Floor Plan



The “Human” Toll

- Brain damage
- Tinnitus
- Sleeping disorders
- PTSD
- Life at home “issues”
- Recurring Migraine Headaches



The Aftermath

- Class Action lawsuit was filed against the fire alarm manufacturer.
- Was the subject of an article in “Popular Science” and by a BBC documentary.
- Resulted in changes to NFPA 12.



Leadership

- Three ESSENTIAL prerequisites
- Stamina
- Technical Competence
- Integrity – defined as people know that you will do the right thing instinctively regardless of the personal consequences.



Conclusion

- The lawsuit settled out of court five years later.
- To this day survivors still live with lingering, permanent affects.
- One of the guards who responded that night and went into the building to save others passed away this past year from cancer – Mark Owsley

