

Death blamed on plutonium racketeers

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NASHVILLE — The auto wreck that took the life of Karen Silkwood may have been murder, according to a journalist who says documents she's seen suggest Miss Silkwood — a nuclear plant processing employe — was carrying information on the black marketing of plutonium when she died.

Mrs. Jacque Strouji, who was fired by the Nashville Tennessean because of her special connections with the FBI, also says she has seen evidence suggesting that plutonium stolen from U.S. nuclear plants is being sold to foreign nations.

Mrs. Strouji, who had previously told the House subcommittee on energy and the Environment that she had seen evidence suggesting that Miss Silkwood may have been murdered, said Friday:

"Karen Silkwood had figures in her possession

which not only pinpointed the exact amount of nuclear material missing but the persons involved, and she didn't know the time bomb she was carrying."

The FBI and state troopers have investigated Miss Silkwood's death, which occurred as she was driving to meet a reporter to discuss complaints about plant safety, and found no evidence of foul play. The Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, however, hired a detective who said he had found evidence of foul play.

Mrs. Strouji said documents she has seen show the amount of nuclear material unaccounted for after processing at the now-closed Kerr-McGee plant in Crescent, Okla., was 10 times that allowable under Nuclear Regulatory Commission — NRC — guidelines.

However, an NRC spokesman later disputed Mrs.

Strouji's account and said plutonium unaccounted for at the Oklahoma plant was "well within" NRC limits.

"Official documents I examined indicate an exceedingly high MUF material unaccounted for figure involving plutonium in excess of that which would be lost in pipes in normal processing," Mrs. Strouji said.

"This would lead me to believe the possibility of nuclear gun-runners dealing in black market plutonium."

Mrs. Strouji said three or four persons who worked at the Kerr-McGee plant might be involved in the black market sales, where she said 60 pounds of plutonium was unaccounted for during 1974. She added only 12 pounds is needed to make a nuclear weapon capable of killing thousands of persons.