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NRC LAUNCHES SPECIAL INSPECTION AT FRAMATOME COGEMA FACILITY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has sent a special three-member inspection team to the Framatome Cogema nuclear fuel facility in Lynchburg, Va. The team will attempt to determine how a nuclear power plant fuel assembly recently received in Lynchburg was inadvertently returned in its original shipping cask to its point of origin in Greifswald, Germany.

NRC dispatched the team Wednesday (November 13) after Framatome Cogema reported that it could not account for one of 180 fuel assemblies — containing 126 fuel rods of less than 2-percent enriched uranium — it recently received from Germany. Yesterday, however, the company informed NRC that the fuel assembly had been found in Germany in the original shipping container which had returned after partial unloading in the U.S.

Two of the team members are specialists in material control and accounting. The other is the senior resident inspector from another NRC-licensed facility in Lynchburg, who will focus on transportation activities. They will conduct a comprehensive examination of the incident to determine how such an error could have occurred and to ensure that corrective measures are taken.

The material involved — fresh, Russian-produced fuel originally intended for use in a nuclear power plant in East Germany — has never been used in a reactor and thus does not present a significant public health and safety concern. Framatome Cogema has a contract to remove the fuel pellets from the 180 fuel assemblies and to deliver the uranium to another facility for further processing.

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