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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NRC STAFF SENDS INSPECTORS TO WILKES-BARRE, PENNSYLVANIA,  
TO LOOK INTO INTERNAL CONTAMINATION EVENT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has sent a special inspection team to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, to look into the circumstances of the radioactive contamination of a woman medical technology student.

Preliminary estimates indicate that the amount of radioactive material ingested — technetium-99m, a radioisotope widely used for diagnostic testing — was about the same a patient would receive while undergoing a medical test. Accordingly, no health consequences are expected.

NRC's Region I office in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, was informed of the incident Tuesday afternoon. The student involved is enrolled in medical technology training at Wyoming Valley Health Center in Wilkes-Barre (also known as Wilkes-Barre General Hospital). When the incident occurred, she was working at Mallinckrodt Medical Inc., a nuclear pharmacy in Wilkes-Barre, where she began a two-week assignment Monday.

The internal contamination was discovered earlier Tuesday after the student set off a radiation monitor at the nuclear pharmacy, while attempting to leave the area where radioactive materials are handled. She had assisted in the handling of radioactive technetium-99m in the morning.

Initial testing at the pharmacy and a nuclear medicine scan performed at the hospital indicate the student had an uptake of technetium-99m into the body. Testing is continuing to determine the dose. Investigation is continuing to determine how the student received the internal contamination.

The NRC staff has sent three inspectors and a supervisor to the hospital and nuclear pharmacy to perform follow-up inspections at both facilities.

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