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Region III Office of Public Affairs
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NRC STAFF DISPATCHES AUGMENTED INSPECTION TEAM TO REVIEW
SMALL URANIUM HEXAFLUORIDE RELEASE AT METROPOLIS PLANT

The NRC staff is sending an Augmented Inspection Team to review a small release of uranium hexafluoride which occurred Tuesday morning during maintenance work at the Allied-Signal, Inc., uranium processing plant at Metropolis, Illinois.

The release did not represent a hazard to nearby residents, according to information from the company. Three workers received minor skin irritation from the chemical and were treated at the plant.

Allied-Signal converts yellowcake, a processed uranium ore, into uranium hexafluoride for further processing at an enrichment facility.

The workers loosened a flange during maintenance which permitted a small amount of the uranium hexafluoride to escape into the plant. Some of the material may have been released to the atmosphere but would have quickly dissipated.

When exposed to air, uranium hexafluoride forms hydrogen fluoride which can cause chemical burns. The workers were wearing respirators and protective clothing.

Two NRC inspectors from the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant, located nearby, were sent to monitor the incident at the Allied-Signal plant. Additional NRC inspectors, forming an Augmented Inspection Team, are being sent to the plant to review the circumstances surrounding the release.

When the inspection is completed, the inspectors will meet with the company to discuss the preliminary findings. This meeting will be open to public observation. The schedule and location of the meeting will be announced later.

The NRC team will issue a written report several weeks after the completion of the inspection.

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