



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC TO DISCUSS APPARENT VIOLATIONS WITH BELLMAWR, N.J. FIRM ON CONTROL OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of Underwood Engineering Testing Co., Inc., a Bellmawr, N.J., company on Wednesday, Jan. 9, to discuss three apparent violations of agency requirements involving the control, security and use of NRC-licensed radioactive materials. The apparent violations are based on an NRC special inspection initiated after a portable nuclear gauge owned by the firm was reported stolen from a company employee's vehicle last March. One of two small radioactive sources in the gauge was recovered.

Known as a predecisional enforcement conference, the meeting is scheduled for 1 p.m. in the Public Meeting Room at the NRC Region I Office, at 475 Allendale Road in King of Prussia, Pa. It will be open to the public for observation with an opportunity to ask questions of NRC staff prior to adjournment.

On March 20, 2007, the NRC's Operations Center was notified about the theft of the portable nuclear gauge the previous day. The gauge contained two sealed radioactive sources; one held a small amount of cesium-137 and the other a small amount of americium-241. At the time, the vehicle in which it was stored was parked at a temporary job site in Philadelphia. City police located the gauge's transport container on March 22 near a scrap yard in Philadelphia. Initial radiological surveys of the scrap yard, conducted by city fire department personnel, indicated that all the radioactive material was contained in a metal drum stored at the site.

However, an NRC-licensed contractor retained by Underwood Engineering could locate only the cesium-137 source. The cesium-137 source was packaged and shipped off-site for disposal. Detailed radiological surveys of the site by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection also failed to find the americium-241 source. A load of scrap metal transferred from the scrap yard to a metal recycling facility in Camden, N.J., on March 21 also led to checks at that location on March 24, but those efforts likewise failed to turn up the missing source. In addition, detailed surveys of the temporary job site, the scrap yard and the Camden facility by personnel from the U.S. Department of Energy's Radiological Assistance Team were unable to locate the americium-241. To date, the americium-241 source has not been found.

In response to the event, the NRC conducted a special inspection of Underwood Engineering's radiation safety program, its procedures to secure portable gauges from unauthorized removal, and the circumstances surrounding the theft of the gauge, as well as to evaluate the company's corrective actions. The inspection took place on March 28 and 29, June 28, July 9 and Aug. 13 at the company's facilities in Bellmawr and at six of its temporary job sites.

The three apparent violations identified during the inspection involved: four examples of failure to use a minimum of two tangible barriers to prevent unauthorized removal of a gauge, as required by NRC regulations; failure to confine possession and use of radioactive material to the locations authorized by the company's NRC license; and failure to provide written notification to the NRC within 60 days of a decision by the firm to permanently cease NRC-licensed activities at one facility and move source handling activities to another facility.

The purpose of the Jan. 9 conference is to discuss the apparent violations and provide the company an opportunity to respond and to provide details of its corrective actions and other additional information to enable the NRC to determine what, if any, enforcement action is warranted.

No enforcement decision will be made by the NRC staff at the conference. Agency management will render a decision following a final evaluation of the apparent violations.

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