



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC TO HOLD PUBLIC MEETING ON CONTAMINATION EVENT AT NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STANDARDS & TECHNOLOGY LAB

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with officials from the National Institute of Standards & Technology on Sept. 17, to discuss the results of a Special Inspection conducted following a plutonium contamination event at a NIST lab in Boulder, Co., in 2008.

The meeting will be held at the Millennium Harvest House Boulder Hotel, 1345 28th St., in Boulder, Co., at 2 p.m. The public will have an opportunity to observe and ask questions of the NRC staff before the meeting is adjourned.

The lab, which is part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, has an NRC license authorizing it to possess and use radioactive materials for scientific research.

On June 9, 2008, a glass vial containing a small quantity of mixed plutonium isotopes ruptured, resulting in the contamination of at least two workers, contamination of their lab and other areas within the facility, and an unplanned discharge of plutonium into the facility's sanitary sewage system when a worker washed his hands.

The NRC subsequently conducted a Special Inspection to interview workers, inspect records, monitor the licensee's response to the incident, review the decontamination of the affected areas and the licensee's adherence to NRC regulations for the storage, handling and use of radioactive materials.

Under the terms of a Confirmatory Action Letter issued by the NRC on July 2, 2008, NIST agreed not to use NRC-licensed radioactive materials until the NRC is satisfied that procedures and training are adequate. The letter also specified that NIST complete a thorough radiation dose assessment for all individuals potentially exposed to plutonium; determine how much plutonium may have been discharged into the sewage system and obtain prior approval from NRC of plans to decontaminate the facility.

The NRC has been monitoring these efforts and notified NIST on July 24, 2009, that they had met all requirements necessary to reopen the lab, although other terms of the Confirmatory Action Letter remain in effect.

A report on the results of the NRC's Special Inspection will be available after the meeting on the agency's online document library at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html>.

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