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NRC Begins Special Inspection at BWX Technologies facility in Lynchburg

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has launched a special inspection at the BWX Technologies fuel facility in Lynchburg, Va., to assess the circumstances surrounding the discovery that workers may have exceeded controls for criticality safety in a production line glovebox.

A glovebox is used by workers to remotely handle radioactive materials and there are strict limits for how much radioactive material and other important materials are allowed within the glovebox. Those controls are important to prevent a criticality, which can occur when uranium accumulates in sufficient quantity and shape to initiate a chain reaction. At the BWXT facility, there were no safety related consequences or criticality, but the potential lapse in controls prompted the NRC to conduct the special inspection. The specific process involved remains shut down.

“BWXT identified this issue and took immediate corrective actions,” said Len Wert, NRC Region II Deputy Administrator. “However, a special inspection is appropriate to ensure we fully understand what happened and the possible implications.”

The special inspection will look at the sequence of events, evaluate the effectiveness of corrective actions, assess the adequacy of management measures and procedures in the area, review the company’s own root cause analysis and determine the adequacy of the event reporting.

A fuel facility inspector from the NRC’s Region II office in Atlanta arrived at the site today and began gathering information. The inspection is likely to take at least a week. A report documenting the findings will be issued within 30 days after the inspection is completed.