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CONTACT: David McIntyre, 301-415-8200

NRC Proposes \$3,500 Civil Penalty on Texas A&M University for Research Reactor Violations

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has proposed a civil penalty of \$3,500 against Texas A&M University's Nuclear Science Center for violations of operating procedures for the center's research reactor.

A notice of violation issued Oct. 22 cites two specific violations that occurred in May 2013. Two operators left the control room the night of May 14 having verified the reactor was in a safe condition but without completely shutting it down as defined in the university's license. The next day, a manager willfully falsified records to show that the operators had completed the shutdown procedure when in fact they had not.

The NRC staff determined the willful falsification of records was a Severity Level III violation and proposed the \$3,500 civil penalty. The other violation was assessed as Severity Level IV. The agency has a four-tiered severity scale in which Severity Level I is the most serious.

"Although there was never any threat to the safety of the reactor operators or the campus community, the NRC cannot and will not tolerate willful violations of its requirements," said Lawrence Kokajko, director of the Division of Policy and Rulemaking in the NRC's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, which oversees research and test reactors.

"The Nuclear Science Center has already responded to these violations by implementing extensive corrective actions to ensure they don't happen again," Kokajko said. "We have seen positive changes to the center's safety culture, organization and procedures over the past two years."

The center may accept the violation, contest it, or request neutral mediation under the NRC's alternative dispute resolution program.