

October 4, 2005

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION OF EVENT OR UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE -- PNO-IV-05-014

This preliminary notification constitutes EARLY notice of events of POSSIBLE safety or public interest significance. The information is as initially received without verification or evaluation, and is basically all that is known by the Region IV staff on this date.

Facility

Department of the Army
White Sands Missile Range
CSTE-DTC-WS-ST-S
White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico 88002

Licensee Emergency Classification

Notification of Unusual Event
 Alert
 Site Area Emergency
 General Emergency
 Not Applicable

Docket: 030-09345
License: 30-02405-10

SUBJECT: PANORAMIC IRRADIATOR SEALED SOURCE STUCK IN UNSHIELDED POSITION

DESCRIPTION: This is an update to Event Notification 42031 regarding a misposition radiation source in an irradiator located at the White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) in New Mexico. The source is inside the facility where it is normally used, but it is stuck in an unshielded position. Radiation levels outside the building housing the irradiator are consistent with routine irradiator operations.

During the week of September 26, 2005, the irradiator was undergoing routine maintenance. During post-maintenance testing on September 29, 2005, a sealed source became lodged in the irradiator exposure head. Routine retrieval methods were successful and the source was subsequently retracted. On September 30, 2005, the exposure head was disassembled and the irradiator's operability was verified. Air pressure is utilized to position the sources in this irradiator. After the work activities, a small air leak was detected and the air pressure was adjusted. During the retest of the irradiator, the source again became stuck in the irradiator's exposure head (unshielded position). The licensee indicated that the source is being prevented from retraction by a switch in the exposure head. The licensee's retrieval procedures have not been successful in freeing the source.

The licensee has contacted Sandia National Laboratories for assistance in repositioning the source to the shielded position with the use of a radiation-hard robot. A plan is currently being prepared for retrieval of the source.

On the morning of October 4, Region IV dispatched an inspector to the site to monitor source retrieval operations and to conduct additional reviews into the licensee's activities.

The State of New Mexico has been informed.

Region IV received notification of this occurrence by telephone from the NRC's Headquarters Operation Center at 2:40 p.m. (CDT) on October 1, 2005. Region IV has informed OEDO, NMSS, OSTP and the Region's PAO and SLO.

This information has been discussed with the licensee and is current as of 12:30 p.m.(CDT on October 4, 2005.

ADAMS ACCESSION NUMBER: ML 052770395

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