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NRC INCIDENT INVESTIGATION TEAM GOES TO PITTSBURGH TO PROBE
SECOND FAILURE OF CANCER TREATMENT DEVICE; PATIENT NOT INJURED

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Incident Investigation Team (IIT), here since last Thursday to investigate the root causes of the death of an 82-year-old woman, associated with the failure of the device that employed a radioactive source to treat her for cancer, last night began looking into a second such equipment failure in another treatment center run by the same company and using the same model treatment machine.

Fast action by medical personnel attending this latest patient appears to have averted a radiation injury to her.

Dr. Carl Paperiello, IIT Leader, and other team members, went to the Pittsburgh facility this morning (12/8/92).

Medical authorities have said that the patient treated in the Indiana Regional Cancer Center on November 16, 1992, and who died on November 21st, had the radioactive source used in her treatment remain in her afterwards, and the high exposure from the source contributed to her death.

About 3:35 p.m. yesterday (12/7/92), officials of the Greater Pittsburgh Cancer Center in Pittsburgh had just completed a treatment for lung cancer with the device when the attending radiation physicist noticed a malfunction alarm on the machine, the Center reported to the NRC about 5 p.m. Monday. The physicist, seeing that the source was suspended in a catheter between the patient and the machine that controls the movement of the source, cut the catheter and removed the patient from the treatment room. Then he reentered the room and, using forceps to reduce any potential exposure to himself, placed the source in a heavily shielded container. The physicist said he believed that his own exposure, and the exposure of the patient beyond what had been prescribed for her treatment, were negligible.

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