

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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NRC SENDS SPECIAL INSPECTION TEAM TO TENNESSEE NUCLEAR FUEL PLANT

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has dispatched a special Augmented Inspection Team (AIT) to the Nuclear Fuel Services, Inc. (NFS) nuclear fuel plant in Erwin, Tennessee, to review the circumstances associated with a fire during the afternoon of April 2, 1996, in the ventilation exhaust ductwork for the incinerator at the facility. Waste, contaminated with uranium, was being burned in the incinerator at the time of the fire.

The environmental data collected so far do not indicate any off-site release of radioactive material as a result of the fire, and no NFS employees were injured. However, the potential safety significance of the event prompted NRC officials to send a team of inspectors, including a manager and two inspectors from the NRC's regional office in Atlanta and two inspectors from the NRC's headquarters in Washington, to the facility for a detailed review of the circumstances surrounding the fire and corrective actions being taken by the company. The team arrived at the site and began its investigation during the evening of April 2.

The team is looking specifically at the sequence of events before, during and after the fire, the extent of any radiological or chemical consequences, fire damage to structures needed for safe operation of the facility, the root cause of the fire and the adequacy of the NFS response to the fire. The review is expected to be completed within a few days and a public exit meeting with NFS will be scheduled soon after the completion of the inspections. The final AIT report will be issued several weeks after that exit meeting.

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(NOTE TO EDITORS: A news conference will be scheduled to coincide with the Augmented Inspection Team exit meeting and you will be notified of the date and time of that news conference as soon as the meeting is scheduled)