

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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NRC ISSUES REPORT
ON CONTROL OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a report prepared by a joint NRC-state working group that makes recommendations to tighten control over devices containing radioactive material.

The devices, which are regulated by the NRC or the states, include gauges used to measure the thickness of material, self-illuminated exit signs, gas chromatographs used in chemical analysis, static eliminators, and teletherapy machines used in medicine.

The working group was formed to consider problems related to loss of control over and accountability for the devices. As a result of inadequate control, some devices have been inadvertently mixed with metal scrap intended to be melted down and recycled into other products. In some cases, the devices have been accidentally smelted in steel mills, resulting in radioactive contamination of the mills themselves, of their metal products, and of slag and furnace dust. In the United States, the costs of mill decontamination, waste disposal and temporary mill closings following such contaminated smeltings have been as high as \$23 million per event. There also is a risk of radiation exposure to unsuspecting workers and members of the public.

The report recommends increased regulatory oversight, significant penalties for losing devices, and that NRC ensure proper disposal of devices containing NRC-licensable material that have found their way into the public domain and for which no one else claims responsibility. It also recommends that states implement similar measures for naturally occurring radioactive material, which is not regulated by the NRC, and that the NRC issue information to non-licensees who are likely to come into contact with lost devices.

The working group included seven members from the NRC and Agreement States (29 states that have assumed, by mutual agreement, part of the NRC's regulatory authority). The

group held a public workshop in January and five public meetings.

Copies of the document, "Final Report of the NRC-Agreement State Working Group to Evaluate Control and Accountability of Licensed Devices," (NUREG-1551) are available for review and copying in the NRC Public Document Room, 2120 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20555-0001. They may also be purchased from the Government Printing Office, P.O. Box 37082, Washington, D.C. 20402-9328.

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