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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NRC CITES FIRM FOR VIOLATION INVOLVING TRANSFER OF "EXIT" SIGNS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has cited a New York company for a violation of agency requirements involving the transfer and disposal of "EXIT" signs containing radioactive material in New Jersey. No fine has been proposed against the New York City-based Pneumo Abex Corporation.

In May, a 16-year-old boy removed three signs holding tritium from a Union, N.J., demolition site, took them to his home and opened one of them, exposing himself and his family's residence to the radioactive gas. No one suffered any adverse health effects as a result of the incident.

However, following a predecisional enforcement conference on July 10 with Pneumo Abex and two other companies that at various times owned the property and therefore the signs, NRC staff determined that Pneumo Abex had violated agency requirements.

"This violation represents a significant NRC concern because it ultimately contributed to the failure to appropriately dispose of the signs, and the resultant contamination of members of the public," NRC Region I Administrator Hubert J. Miller wrote in a letter to Pneumo Abex.

The signs, which are illuminated without electricity, were purchased by Pneumo Abex in 1983 for use in the building. An NRC inspection found that when Pneumo Abex sold the property to the Selrite Millworks Corporation of Union, N.J., in 1987, it failed to provide Selrite with a copy of the agency regulations that apply to the possession of such devices. In addition, Pneumo Abex failed to notify the NRC of the transfer of the signs.

Consequently, when Selrite sold the facility to Carco Construction Company of Randolph, N.J., last February, Selrite did not provide Carco with a copy of NRC guidelines regarding the signs or inform the agency of the transfer. Afterward, Carco did not remove the devices for proper disposal when the building at the site was being demolished.

On May 10, the teen-age boy in question took the signs from the demolition site and brought them home. While eating a snack in his basement bedroom, he dismantled one of the signs, breaking several tubes containing tritium. He contacted local emergency response personnel after seeing a radioactive materials label. Emergency personnel contacted the State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, which notified the NRC.

Estimates by the New Jersey DEP indicate the boy received a radioactive dose of about 70 millirems, less than the equivalent of one year of exposure to natural background radiation, which for the average American is about 300 millirems. Surveys of the boy's bedroom showed moderate contamination, while only trace amounts were found elsewhere in the house. A contractor hired by the DEP removed the contamination from the home.

The NRC did not fine Pneumo Abex because under the statute of limitations, too much time had elapsed since the violation. The NRC also noted the corrective actions taken by the company, including the fact that Pneumo Abex has agreed to take responsibility for disposal of the signs and to perform an extensive review to determine if any other properties owned by Pneumo Abex, either formerly or currently, might contain the same type of signs.

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