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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NRC STAFF ADVISES NEW JERSEY IN RESPONSE TO  
INGESTION OF RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL BY 16-YEAR-OLD UNION BOY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff is advising the State of New Jersey in its response to the ingestion of radioactive material by a 16-year-old Union, N.J., boy on Saturday. The event is not believed to pose a health hazard to the boy or other members of the public.

The teenager has told officials he removed three "exit" signs from a demolition site on Commerce Avenue in Union, and took them to his home. While eating a snack, in his basement bedroom, the boy dismantled one of the signs, breaking several tubes containing radioactive tritium gas in the process. He contacted local emergency response personnel after seeing the radioactive materials label. Emergency personnel contacted the State of New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), who then contacted the NRC. Representatives from DEP and the Department of Energy's Brookhaven National Laboratory responded and collected urine samples from the teenager and several others who visited him in his home. In addition, officials took samples from the bedroom and other areas of the home to determine the extent of contamination.

The 16-year-old has an uptake of tritium, the exact extent of which is still being evaluated. Preliminary estimates project a dose comparable to the dose typically received by an individual in one year from natural background radiation. The boy has been advised to drink extra fluids to flush the tritium from his body. Only minute traces of tritium have been found in other individuals.

Survey results so far show moderate contamination in the boy's bedroom, but only trace amounts elsewhere in the house.

One additional "exit" sign was retrieved from the demolition site. The signs are licensed by the NRC under a general license. Owners are required under terms of the license either to return them to the manufacturer or dispose of them by approved means at the end of their use. NRC will conduct a follow-up inspection of the apparent loss of control of generally licensed material.

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