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WASHINGTON HOSPITAL CENTER AGREES TO IMPROVE
HANDLING OF RADIOACTIVE WASTE

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has obtained agreement from Washington Hospital Center to take numerous steps to improve deficiencies found in the hospital's program for handling, controlling, storing and disposing of radioactive waste at its Washington, D.C. facility.

This commitment is documented in an NRC confirmatory action letter issued today, based on the results of an inspection conducted February 24-26. An NRC inspector found that wastes from many different areas within the facilities were not adequately surveyed, identified, packaged, labelled, secured, segregated, stored and disposed of, causing a loss of control over radioactive material. One finding was that radioactive waste was burned in the facility's incinerator in early January of this year, even though Washington Hospital Center does not have an NRC license to incinerate radioactive materials. The inspector also discovered that, in February 1996, contaminated material was inadvertently given to a non-radioactive waste hauler.

The NRC inspector noted that, because of the lack of adequate controls, radioactive waste was often mixed with other waste and taken to the incinerator facility. If the waste set off incinerator radiation monitors, unqualified or untrained workers responded, often attempting to identify the cause of the radiation alarm by sorting through the waste bags and boxes by hand.

Officials have agreed that the hospital will immediately initiate corrective action by ensuring that proper radiological surveys are conducted by trained and qualified staff. The hospital also has made a commitment to ensure that procedures are strictly implemented to ensure proper handling of radioactive wastes.

Issuance of a confirmatory action letter does not preclude the issuance of an order formalizing the commitments, nor does it

preclude NRC from taking enforcement action of violations of NRC requirements that may have occurred.

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