

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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**NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$10,500 CIVIL PENALTY AGAINST BAXTER
HEALTHCARE CORPORATION OF PUERTO RICO**

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$10,500 civil penalty against Baxter HEALTH CARE Corporation of Puerto Rico for performing an unauthorized alteration and multiple unauthorized repairs on an irradiator the company operates at Aibonito.

The NRC action follows agency inspections at the facility in 1996 and 1997, an investigation completed by the NRC's Office of Investigations on November 17 of last year, and a predecisional enforcement conference held at the facility on January 12 of this year. NRC officials said the inspections and the investigation indicated the company violated NRC regulatory requirements when, in June of 1996, an interlock switch, which is part of an "on/off" mechanism in the irradiator's safety system, was bypassed. Three additional subsequent violations occurred when company personnel conducted unauthorized repairs of equipment affecting the "on/off" mechanism.

NRC officials said no accidents or injuries occurred but that the irradiator's license requires that alterations or repairs be conducted only by its manufacturer or other persons specifically licensed or authorized by the NRC.

The irradiator uses radioactive cobalt-60 which is stored under water and raised in a shielded room during processing to provide gamma irradiation to sterilize medical products.

The company has 30 days from receipt of the Notice of Violation to either pay the fine or protest its imposition.

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