

United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
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NRC ISSUES BULLETIN ON TRANSPORTATION PACKAGES FOR RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a bulletin to holders of NRC certificates of compliance for packages used to transport radioactive materials.

The bulletin asks the companies to review their methods for conducting one of the tests NRC requires to show the ability of the packages to withstand hypothetical accident conditions and to take certain actions if the review shows that the tests were not performed in accordance with NRC requirements. The bulletin further requires each certificate holder to submit a response by October 23.

The test of concern is designed to demonstrate that a package can withstand a puncture test when it is dropped 40 inches, in a position for which maximum damage is expected, onto the end of a vertical steel bar mounted on an essentially unyielding, horizontal surface.

The NRC issued Confirmatory Action Letters in June to Amersham Corporation and Source Production and Equipment Co., Inc. (SPEC), who hold NRC certificates of compliance for transportation packages, because of concerns about the methods they used to conduct the required test. Both companies agreed to suspend fabrication of the packages pending retesting. Amersham recently began retesting their packages, and SPEC has resumed limited fabrication after completing retesting.

The bulletin requests the approximately 40 holders of certificates of compliance, for about 200 package designs, to:

-- Determine, for each of their certified package designs, the method they used to evaluate the ability of the package to withstand a puncture -- e.g., physical testing of a full-size specimen, physical testing of a scale-model specimen, engineering analyses, or comparison to a similar package design. For package designs where the ability to withstand a puncture was based on a physical test, the certificate holder should determine whether the puncture test was performed in accordance with NRC regulations.

-- For any package design for which the ability to withstand a puncture was based on physical tests that were not performed in accordance with NRC requirements:

(1) Identify any special precautions or operational controls needed to ensure safe use of the package, pending retesting and reassessment of the package design;

(2) Prepare a justification showing why there are no health and safety concerns that would require immediate removal of packages of that design from service; and

(3) Prepare a plan and schedule for demonstrating the adequacy of the design to meet the hypothetical accident conditions specified in the regulations.

In the response required by October 23, the certificate holder must indicate its schedule for meeting the NRC-requested actions. In addition, after the requested actions have been completed, the certificate holder is to submit a report confirming the completion.

A copy of the bulletin will be available via the NRC website at <http://www.nrc.gov/OPA/reports/>.

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