



NRC NEWS

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801 Warrenville Road

Lisle IL 60532

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CONTACT: Jan Strasma (630)829-9663/e-mail: rjs2@nrc.gov

Pam Alloway-Mueller (630)829-9662/e-mail: pla@nrc.gov

NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$11,000 FINE FOR RADIATION OVEREXPOSURE LAST YEAR AT SOUTHEAST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed an \$11,000 fine against Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, for violations of NRC regulations associated with a radiation overexposure to a contractor in June of last year.

The overexposure occurred during work by the contractor to inventory and remove radioactive material stored in a safe in the basement of Magill Hall at the university. Subsequently, radioactive contamination was found in several areas of the building. The contamination was successfully cleaned up.

The contractor was exposed to airborne americium-241 which, when inhaled, is largely deposited in a person's bones. This resulted in a radiation dose of 263 rems to the bone surface, exceeding the NRC annual dose limit of 50 rem to individual organs or body tissues.

The university was cited for failing to make the necessary radiation surveys to determine the hazards present; for failure to control activities to avoid exceeding the NRC radiation dose limits; and for possessing radioactive material -- americium-241 and two other radioactive isotopes -- that was not authorized in the university's NRC license.

The amount of the proposed fine was doubled because the university took four months to determine the contents of the safe once it was questioned by an NRC inspector; because it possessed the material for 10 years without license authorization; and for failing to implement an effective radiation protection program which allowed the problems to persist and contributed to the overexposure.

There were two additional violations for which a fine was not assessed. These violations were failing to secure a strontium-90 sealed source, which could not be accounted for in the university's inventory and failing to have a radiation safety officer from August 1999 until July of last year.

The NRC staff noted that the university had taken extensive corrective actions after the contamination occurred including retaining a qualified contractor to survey and clean up the contamination and assess individuals who might have been exposed to the americium-241.

The university has until October 15 to pay the fine or to protest it. If the fine is protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the university may request a hearing.

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