



NRC NEWS

UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, REGION II

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NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$7,500 CIVIL PENALTY AGAINST HOSPITAL IN HATO REY, PUERTO RICO, FOR NONCOMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$7,500 civil penalty against I. Gonzalez Martinez Oncologic Hospital in Hato Rey, Puerto Rico, for violation of NRC safety requirements after a radioactive therapy source was misplaced, left unprotected in a room where an employee unknowingly received unnecessary exposure, and found in a trash compactor in an alley outside the hospital some 19 hours after it was lost.

NRC officials said that around 11:30 a.m. on March 14, 2001, hospital personnel removed a brachytherapy implant containing about 97 millicuries of radioactive Cesium-137 from a patient. Failure to adequately label, count or control the radioactive material caused it to be misplaced, and it was not until 8:00 p.m. that hospital personnel noted that it was missing.

Federal regulations require that the dose in any unrestricted area from external sources does not exceed 2 millirems in any one hour. However, on March 14 and 15, 2001, the hospital created radiation levels of up to approximately 50 millirems an hour in the vicinity of the trash compactor and public parking lot. The NRC said hospital personnel also allowed the source to remain unshielded in a brachytherapy preparation room, a restricted area, before it was sent to the trash compactor but did not perform adequate surveys to ensure that a hospital employee entering the room was not exposed to radioactivity in excess of allowable limits.

The NRC said hospital examination of the circumstances associated with the event indicated that the employee, who was not a radiation worker, did not receive an exposure of more than 100 millirems, the annual limit for individuals not licensed to work with radioactive material. There was also no indication that anyone received more than 100 millirems while the material was in the trash compactor in the alley.

The hospital has 30 days from receipt of the Notice of Violation to either pay the civil penalty or to protest it.

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