



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

801 Warrenville Road

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Web Site: <http://www.nrc.gov>

No. III-03-040

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May 12, 2003

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NRC PROPOSES \$6,000 FINE AGAINST ST. JOSEPH MERCY HOSPITAL IN MICHIGAN FOR OVEREXPOSURE TO A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has proposed a \$6,000 fine against St. Joseph Mercy Health System in Ann Arbor, Michigan, for a radiation exposure in excess of NRC limits for a member of the public.

The excessive radiation exposure involved a family member who had prolonged contact with a patient receiving a nuclear medicine treatment in July of last year.

A patient at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital received a therapeutic dose of radioactive iodine-131 on July 1 of last year. The patient's condition subsequently worsened, and she died on July 7. There is no indication that her death was associated with the iodine-131 treatment.

Members of the patient's family who visited during the treatment period of July 1 to 7 were in prolonged, close contact with the patient.

The hospital staff provided shielding around the patient to reduce radiation levels and counseled family members on the need to minimize their time and proximity to the patient. Family members, who wanted to maintain close contact with the patient, disregarded the radiation safety instructions provided by the staff.

One family member, who spent the longest period of time in close contact with the patient, received a total dose of 3,000 to 15,000 millirem (A millirem is a standard measure of radiation dose), which exceeds the NRC limit of 100 millirem per year. Other members of the family may have received significantly lower doses.

The NRC conducted a special inspection to review the circumstances and causes regarding exposures to members of the public which exceeded the NRC limits, as well as the hospital's corrective actions. Although the NRC determined that radiation exposures within the reported range would not cause any significant health effects, the NRC inspectors found violations of NRC requirements to limit radiation doses to members of the public, and promptly identify and implement corrective actions.

In the letter to the hospital, NRC Region III Regional Administrator James Dyer states, "The NRC staff understands that the case involved unusual circumstances and that you did not want to

appear uncompassionate toward the patient or her family.” However, the hospital could have taken more proactive steps to determine the visitors’ doses more accurately and to limit their exposure, he says. The letter also notes that the hospital has taken appropriate corrective actions to prevent recurrence of violations.

The hospital has until June 6 to either pay the fine or to protest it. If the fine is protested and subsequently imposed by the NRC staff, the company may request a hearing.

The letter notifying St. Joseph Mercy Hospital of the proposed fine has been posted to the NRC web site at: <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/enforcement/actions/>.

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