



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs, Region I
475 Allendale Road, King of Prussia, Pa.

www.nrc.gov

No. I-06-027

April 19, 2006

Contact: Diane Screnci, 610/337-5330
Neil Sheehan, 610/337-5331

E-mail: opal@nrc.gov

NRC AND PENNSYLVANIA COMPANY, GEOMECHANICS, TO DISCUSS APPARENT VIOLATIONS INVOLVING NUCLEAR GAUGE

Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff will meet with representatives of GeoMechanics, Inc., an Elizabeth (Allegheny County), Pa.-based consulting company, on Wednesday, April 26, to discuss two apparent violations of agency regulations stemming from the temporary loss of a nuclear gauge. One deals with a failure by a company employee to secure the gauge in compliance with agency requirements; another involves a failure to file a written report with the NRC following the theft of the device.

Known as a predecisional enforcement conference, the meeting is scheduled to begin at 1 p.m. at the NRC Region I Office, 475 Allendale Road in King of Prussia, Pa. It will be open to the public and NRC staff will be available to answer questions before the session is adjourned.

The apparent violations were identified as the result of an NRC inspection conducted in January and February 2006 at GeoMechanics' office in Elizabeth and at a temporary job site in West Elizabeth, Pa. The inspection was conducted in response to an event in September of last year. On Sept. 18, 2005, an employee of the company authorized to use its nuclear gauges parked a pickup truck holding a gauge in the parking lot of a South Charleston, W.Va., motel. The gauge, which contains small amounts of cesium-137 and americium-241 and is used for such industrial purposes as measuring soil density, was in a locked container in the open bed of the vehicle. The container was secured to the truck using a single lock and chain.

The following morning, the employee discovered the lock had been cut and the container, including the gauge, had been removed. Local police and the NRC were immediately notified.

On Sept. 23, 2005, the gauge was found abandoned along a highway in Danville, W.Va. It was still in its container and was undamaged.

Based on the results of an inspection, the NRC has identified two apparent violations by GeoMechanics. The NRC, as of July 2005, requires that a minimum of two independent physical controls be used to secure portable nuclear gauges from being stolen or lost. In this case, a single chain and lock were used to secure the gauge to the vehicle while it was parked overnight.

The second apparent violation is based on GeoMechanics' failure to submit a written report to the NRC within 30 days following a theft of radioactive material requiring an immediate telephone report. Specifically, the company notified the NRC of the theft by telephone on Sept. 19, 2005. The required report was not received until Feb. 9, 2006.

The purpose of the April 26th meeting is to obtain information to enable the NRC to determine what, if any, enforcement action is warranted. For instance, there will be an effort to come to a common understanding of the facts and a discussion of root causes of the event and corrective actions undertaken by the company.

No decision will be made by the NRC staff at the session. Rather, NRC management will render a decision in the near future.

###