



Department of Mechanical Engineering

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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September 18, 2006

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Attn: Document Control
Washington, D.C. 20555-0001

Subject: Violation of 10 CFR 50.54 (k) at The University of Texas

Ref: Facility License R-129, Docket 50-602

Dear Sirs:

This letter is to detail the circumstances and document a violation of 10 CFR 50.54 (k) at the Nuclear Engineering Teaching Laboratory (NETL) of The University of Texas at Austin (UT). On August 2, 2006, a recently licensed (less than one week) Reactor Operator left the control room unattended for approximately 2 minutes. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the UT Reactor Oversight Committee (ROC) were informed of the violation by phone and email on August 3, 2006.

Circumstances of Violation

The recently licensed Reactor Operator performed a morning startup of the UT TRIGA reactor under the supervision of a recently licensed Senior Reactor Operator (SRO). The reactor was started up to full power by 0930. At approximately 1130, the SRO informed the RO that he was going downstairs (the control room is effectively on the second floor) to get his lunch and that the RO had the console control. The RO acknowledged the turnover, electronically signed into the console and the SRO left the area. A short but undetermined time later (approximately 15 minutes), the SRO heard the first floor stairway door open and the RO came out and started down the hall. The SRO asked the RO who was in the control room, at which point the RO turned around and went back to the reactor control room. When the Reactor Manager arrived at the facility he was informed of the RO's actions. The Reactor Manager relieved the RO of his duties and informed him that his operator's license was suspended pending a NETL management review of the incident. The individual was sent home and told to return the next day.

The NETL Associate Director returned to the facility from vacation on the afternoon of August 2 and was informed of the incident at approximately 1600 on August 2. The following morning, the Associate Director interviewed the Reactor Operator to ascertain the reason for the individual's actions. The individual said that he just wasn't thinking about the reactor at the time and remembered he needed some letterhead paper to send out letters from the Student American Nuclear Society. He said he was on his way to the

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Administrative Office when the SRO stopped him. The Associate Director noted that the individual had been counseled (and as recently as a week before) on actively thinking, facility safety and staying focused on a task. It was also noted the individual passed through three doors and a flight of stairs before he was stopped thus reinforcing the individual's unfocused state-of-mind. The individual was informed by the Associate Director that his behavior constituted an unacceptable reactor and personnel safety risk and his license was to be terminated and he would no longer be employed by the NETL.

The Associate Director informed Mr. Alexander Adams, NRC Project Manager, at approximately 1000 on August 3 of the violation. It was noted that the incident was a violation of NETL Technical Specifications 6.1.3 and 10 CFR 50.54.k. The UT Reactor Oversight Committee and NETL Director were informed of the event by email later the same day. The terminated employee's keys had been confiscated during his interview and his electronic facility access was revoked so that he had no access to the NETL reactor.

NETL management considers it the facility educational mission to support training and encourage improvement of individuals selected to obtain a reactor operator's license. The particular individual is an undergraduate at The University of Texas and had been counseled on several occasions concerning attention to detail and "active" thinking. The individual is an engineering student with average grades but was removed from the reactor operator licensing program approximately six months prior to his scheduled examination due to a failure to follow directions. He was placed on a probationary program of review, appeared to improve, and was returned to the licensing training program after four months. Immediately following his operator licensing examination in June 2006 but prior to the issuance of his license, the individual made another significant error and failed to completely follow a written checklist. The individual was directly counseled by the Associate Director with the Reactor Supervisor attending that no further performance errors would be tolerated.

Corrective Actions

NETL Management considers this an isolated event based on the particular individual's history of easy distraction and difficulty focusing on mental tasks. To avoid a recurrence of the incident the following changes were made to facility operations:

1. The Reactor Control Room door will remain closed when the reactor is not shutdown. Previously, the door would be propped open during the day and only closed and locked in the evening or during security events. The open door may have contributed to an overall casualness in the entry and exit of the room. Closing the door will allow the person leaving the control room to make a final conscious connection that he or she is exiting and note that a licensed operator must remain in the Control Room.
2. The SRO and RO will formally sign into the logbook by signature rather than printing the individual's name in the book. This is to emphasize the formality

of the turnover and the responsibility of the position. Additionally, when required, a third person as dictated in the Technical Specifications will sign into the logbook following a briefing of their responsibilities by the SRO.

3. An immediate lecture was given to all reactor operators on applicable portions of 10 CFR 50 and 55, the details of the incident and the corrective actions.

Operator training and all corrective actions were implemented by September 10, 2006. This incident and the corrective actions will be reviewed at the next meeting of the UT Reactor Oversight Committee. Please contact me at 512-232-5373 if you require additional information.

Sincerely,



Sean O'Kelly
NETL Associate Director

xc: C. Bassett, NRR
A. Adams, NRR
UT ROC Chairman
NRC Correspondence