



NRC NEWS

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NRC PROPOSES \$32,500 FINE AGAINST BWXT IN LYNCHBURG, VA

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission Thursday proposed a \$32,500 fine against BWX Technologies for a violation of NRC safety requirements involving failure to analyze a potential nuclear criticality safety event at the company's plant near Lynchburg, Va.

NRC officials said that no criticality occurred, but that on July 26, 2007, a specially designed vacuum cleaner carrying high enriched uranium solution spilled its contents into an attached plastic bag being used for contamination control, a configuration which had not been analyzed for nuclear criticality safety. Officials said that, in this case, actual consequences of the spill were minimal because of the amount and low concentration of high enriched uranium solution. However, they said the potential consequences were significant because, under different circumstances in which a sufficient concentration of available high enriched uranium solution had been present, a criticality accident would have been possible.

A "criticality" can occur when high enriched uranium comes together in sufficient quantity or in a container of correct shape to initiate a chain reaction resulting in either a "burst" or a sustained release of radiation. The NRC said such an event would not be expected to have a health effect upon people or the environment outside the facility but could be catastrophic to individuals in the immediate area inside the plant.

The NRC concluded that BWXT, in this case, had insufficient controls to ensure that high enriched uranium solution in vacuum cleaners would be maintained below acceptable quantities and concentrations.

NRC officials said the reason for the violation, actions taken and planned to correct the violation and prevent recurrence, and the date when full compliance will be achieved, as reflected in BWXT's November 16, 2007 response letter, have been adequately addressed.

The company has 30 days from receipt of the Notice of Violation to either pay the fine or to protest its imposition, in whole or in part.

A copy of the letter and its enclosures, sent by the NRC to the company on January 24, will be available electronically for public inspection in the NRC Public Document Room or from

the NRC's document system (ADAMS), accessible from the NRC web site at www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/pdr.html and at www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html .

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