



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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NRC PROPOSES \$13,000 FINE FOR SABIA, INC.

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has proposed a fine of \$13,000 against SABIA, Inc. for violating NRC requirements in connection with an incident in which several workers were exposed to radioactive contamination at the company's facility in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

The company, which is based in San Diego, Calif., holds an NRC license authorizing it to manufacture, distribute and service gauges containing sealed radioactive materials that are used by the coal mining and cement industry. On Feb. 29, 2008, while disassembling a gauge, a worker inhaled radioactive materials and was contaminated on his hands, face and clothing, three other workers received exposures and the facility became extensively contaminated. Surveys of public areas outside the lab did not detect any radioactive contamination.

Although the exposures were below federal regulatory limits and the workers should not suffer any long-term adverse health effects, the exposures were avoidable, the NRC determined. "In evaluating the significance of the violation, the NRC has concluded that although no actual exposures in excess of regulatory limits occurred, SABIA's actions in leading up to the contamination event and its inadequate actions in responding to the event created a substantial potential for exposures or releases in excess of the applicable NRC regulatory limits," NRC Region IV Administrator Elmo E. Collins said in a letter to the company.

An NRC inspector visited the facility several hours after the event to assess SABIA's immediate response to the incident. Collins noted that it took "considerable prompting" on the part of the NRC to ensure that the company took appropriate actions, such as notifying local responders and collecting bio-samples from workers to assess their radiation exposure.

On March 5, 2008, NRC issued a Confirmatory Action Letter to SABIA, requiring the company to submit a decontamination plan to NRC and keep the Idaho Falls facility closed until given permission by the NRC. The facility reopened last June following NRC approval.

A pre-decisional enforcement conference was held with company officials on Nov. 10, 2008, to review the facts and circumstances surrounding the event. The NRC has determined the company violated a requirement that it develop, document and implement a radiation protection program commensurate with the scope and extent of licensed activities.

The company has 30 days to pay the proposed fine or challenge it. The NRC's letter, its enclosures and the company's response will be made available to the public through the agency's electronic reading room at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams.html>. Help in accessing these documents is available from the NRC Public Document Room at 1-800-397-4209.

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