



NRC NEWS

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NRC SENDS SPECIAL INSPECTION TEAM TO B&W IN LYNCHBURG, VA.

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has dispatched a Special Inspection team to B&W Nuclear Operations Group in Lynchburg, Va., to assess the circumstances associated with a July 15 event that prompted the facility to go into alert status for nearly five hours.

A saw used to cut fuel components was found to have discharged oil which contained an unknown amount of highly enriched uranium into a receptacle. Plant personnel identified that the situation represented a loss of safety controls for uranium and declared an alert. The material was analyzed and it was learned that only a small amount of uranium was in the oil, leading to an exit of the alert at 12:35 a.m. on July 16.

An alert is the lowest level of NRC emergency classifications for fuel facilities such as B&W. However, the event in the plant's Uranium Recovery area created the potential for a criticality, which can occur when highly enriched uranium accumulates in sufficient quantity and shape to initiate a chain reaction resulting in either a "burst" or a sustained release of radiation.

The NRC Special Inspection team, composed of experts from the agency's Region II offices as well as its Rockville, Md., headquarters, will be tasked with reviewing the factors that led to the build up of enriched uranium. The four-member team, which will include an operations inspector and two criticality safety specialists, is expected to spend about a week on the site.

The NRC inspection will also include a review of B&W's own investigation of the incident's root cause. The NRC inspection team will issue a publicly available report within a few days of the inspection's completion.

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