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NRC ISSUES CONFIRMATORY ORDER TO UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI REACTOR ON IMPROVING EMPLOYEE PROTECTIONS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has issued a Confirmatory Order to the University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, documenting the university's commitments to improve employee protections for raising possible safety issues at its research reactor.

In June of this year, the NRC concluded that a former research scientist had been subjected to employment discrimination and continued retaliation by management of the reactor facility as a result of raising safety issues. NRC regulations prohibit discrimination against employees of nuclear facilities for raising safety issues.

The agency's conclusion was based on the findings of an investigation by the NRC Office of Investigations which began in December 2001.

As a result of that apparent violation of NRC requirements, the university agreed to clarify its procedures for granting researchers access to the reactor facility and to place management of the facility directly under the Office of the Provost to assure better oversight by senior university management.

The university will also develop a long term plan for ensuring a "safety-conscious work environment," one in which employees can raise safety concerns without fear of discrimination. The plan will include an employee cultural survey by an independent organization and annual training of all employees and users of the facility on expectations, policies, and procedures for maintaining a safety conscious work environment.

The NRC will conduct subsequent inspections to monitor the university's compliance with the Order which describes the university's commitments.

The Order is available on the NRC's web site at:

<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/enforcement/actions/reactors/ea02256.pdf>.

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