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NRC Begins Special Inspection at Nuclear Fuel Services

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission is launching a special inspection today at the Nuclear Fuel Services fuel fabrication facility to assess the circumstances surrounding the alleged improper disabling of safety devices in violation of NRC regulations.

The plant, located in Erwin, Tenn., fabricates fuel for the U.S. Navy's nuclear fleet.

On June 17, an employee was observed by an NFS supervisor to be improperly operating two valves that are identified as key safety devices. The valves were propped open, which rendered them unable to perform their intended safety function. They are intended to be manually operated to prevent a hazardous chemical solution from spilling on the floor and causing a chemical exposure. No radioactive materials were involved in the incident.

The event was reported to the NRC by NFS. No spill occurred, so there were no actual safety consequences. NFS immediately shut down the process and initiated an investigation.

The special inspection, to be performed by the NRC's senior resident inspector, will review the facts surrounding the incident, as well as the NFS response and the company's corrective actions to prevent recurrence.

"The special inspection will analyze all the details of this incident," said Victor McCree, the NRC's Region II administrator. "There was no threat to the public or plant workers as a result of this incident, but there was potential for worker exposure to hazardous chemicals."

The on-site portion of the inspection is expected to take about three days. A report documenting the inspection findings will be issued within 45 days of the inspection.