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NRC Issues Confirmatory Action Letter to International Isotopes, Inc.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has issued a Confirmatory Action Letter documenting actions that International Isotopes, Inc., has agreed to take before resuming some operations at its facility in Idaho Falls, Idaho. The NRC is also conducting a follow-up inspection to learn more about the incident.

The letter formalizes commitments company officials have made to the NRC following an incident on Aug. 20 in which a technician received a radiation exposure in excess of NRC limits. The worker was preparing to transfer a shielded Cobalt-60 source into another shielded container when it became stuck. In attempting to move it, the worker received a brief radiation exposure.

While no immediate adverse health effects to the technician are expected, the worker was sent to a local hospital for a blood test to help determine the extent of his exposure. The NRC dispatched an inspector to the site on August 21 to review the sequence of events associated with the exposure and to monitor the licensee's immediate response and follow-up actions.

“We are conducting a follow-up inspection to better understand the circumstances that contributed to this incident and to evaluate actions that International Isotopes has taken to ensure their workers are adequately protected,” said Region IV Administrator Marc Dapas.

The NRC will develop a detailed chronology of the event, evaluate the adequacy of licensee actions in response to the incident and assess the factors which may have contributed to the event. The NRC will prepare a written report that will be made publicly available.

Following a conversation with NRC officials, the company has agreed not to conduct similar transfers of radioactive materials at its Idaho Falls facility until completion of corrective actions. The company has also agreed to provide the NRC with calculations and evaluations used to determine the worker's radiation exposure, perform a detailed root cause analysis of the event, and describe corrective actions to prevent recurrence.

Issuance of the Confirmatory Action Letter does not preclude the NRC from taking other additional actions for any violations of NRC requirements that may be identified.