

QUESTION 3:

Does the NRC have any proof that the missing 25,000 curies of tritium have not been retransferred without proper authorization or diverted or that this tritium is not currently posing a risk to public health?

ANSWER:

The NRC has no proof that the claimed shortfall of tritium in the referenced exports has not been retransferred without U.S. authorization or possibly diverted. As noted in our response to Question 1, the cause of the shipper-receiver discrepancies has not as yet been determined but remains the subject of an ongoing investigation by a special team formed by DOE. Based on the information available to date, improvements in measurements, packaging, and shipping procedures have been identified as areas needing improvement for future shipments.

Because of the inherent properties of tritium and packaging of the material, it is unlikely that this tritium is currently posing a risk to public health. Tritium is a gas which emits only low energy radiation. The small but tight shipping and storage containers completely surround and shield this radiation so there is no significant external radiation level. Furthermore, in the unlikely event that it were released, it would tend to dissipate in the air. The facilities in which it is used have ventilation systems that further dissipate the tritium gas. Therefore, except under some unusual circumstance where ventilation systems were not working, no significant personnel exposure would result.

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