

U. S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

REGION V

Report No. 94-01

Docket No. 030-01217
License No. 04-00916-04

Licensee: Veterans Administration Medical Center
16111 Plummer Street
Sepulveda, California 91343

Inspection at: Veterans Administration Medical Center
16111 Plummer Street
Sepulveda, California 91343

Inspector: Kent M. Prendergast 2/24/94
Kent M. Prendergast Radiation Specialist Date Signed

Approved by: G. P. Yuhas 2/25/94
Gregory P. Yuhas, Chief, Radioactive Materials Safety Branch Date Signed

Inspection Summary:

Special Inspection on February 1, 1994 (Report No. 030-01213/94-01)

Areas Examined: This was a special, unannounced inspection to determine the status of licensee activities following the January 17, 1994, Northridge Earthquake. The inspection included interviews with personnel, radiation surveys, and inspection of a number of facilities where radioactive materials were previously used.

Results: The inspection confirmed that the licensee had suspended all use of radioactive material following the quake. Although portions of the restricted area, like nuclear medicine and RIA laboratories, were heavily damaged, no radioactive contamination was detected. The licensee was aggressively working to fully restore all functions of the Radiation Safety Department and to resume research as soon as possible. The nuclear medicine function will have to be relocated from Building 3 to another facility. No violations of NRC requirements were identified.

DETAILS

1. Persons Contacted

- * Ms. Perry C. Norman, Director
- * Marvin Cohen M.D., Chief, Nuclear Medicine
- * Leonard Spolter, Ph.D., Radiation Safety Officer
- * Ms. Dollie Whitehead, Associate Director
- Lester Yamada, Radiopharmacist
- * Gregory P. Yuhas, Chief Radioactive Materials Safety Branch,
NRC Region V

- * Present during exit briefing

2. Background and Purpose of Inspection

On January 17, 1994, at 4:31 AM, an earthquake struck the Northridge area in Los Angeles, California. The earthquake registered 6.6 on the Richter Scale and the VA facility suffered major damage to some of their facilities. This inspection was performed to determine that adequate precautions were being taken to control radioactive materials and assess the capabilities of the licensee.

3. Facilities Inspected

The inspectors visited the Radiation Safety Office and held discussions with the RSO. The RSO explained that all uses of radioactive materials had been suspended until they had recovered from the earthquake. The RSO also mentioned that some of their analytical equipment which included liquid scintillation and gamma counters had been damaged and that work with RAM would not resume until they had replaced their equipment. The RSO stated that presently they were concentrating their efforts to remove radioactive materials in damaged facilities and perform contamination surveys. The RSO was optimistic that he would be able to resume operations in the near future.

The inspectors toured Building 3 which was the location of the licensee's Nuclear Medicine Department. The building sustained major damage and all medical activities in Building 3 had been transferred to other locations. The inspectors visited nuclear medicine and noted that damage to the Nuclear Medicine Facility was extensive. Because of the major structural damage to the building, the Nuclear Medicine Department had terminated operations and the licensee was in the process of trying to locate a suitable facility for nuclear medicine to resume operations. According to the licensee, all radioactive materials had been surveyed and taken to the waste storage trailer. The licensee was in the process of cleaning up the area and performing surveys to ensure all materials had been removed and there was no radioactive contamination. The NRC inspector performed surveys using a scintillation probe and a thin window G-M probe of selected areas within nuclear medicine. The surveys included sinks, waste containers, fallen cupboards, floors, and walls and included rooms 263 to 272. No radioactive materials or contamination were detected in nuclear medicine.

The inspectors toured the Radioimmunoassay (RIA) laboratory located near nuclear medicine and the RIA laboratory on the first floor in Building 3. The RIA laboratories were surveyed using a low energy gamma probe and there was no contamination identified in either laboratory. There was one labeled RIA waste container observed in the main laboratory. According to the licensee that container was to be removed to the waste storage trailer following their surveys. The container was to be used if there was any iodine 125 waste identified.

Research Laboratory # 1 was visited and the area was noted to have been restored to a near operable condition. The inspectors surveyed selected areas using a low energy gamma (LEG) probe and G-M probe. No contamination was identified. The Laboratory Director explained that presently they had less than 200 microcuries of sodium 22 and phosphorus 32 and that all research and use of radioactive materials has been suspended. The Laboratory Director was hopeful that they would be able to resume operations in the near future.

The licensee's waste storage trailer was inspected. The trailer was appropriately posted and surveys indicated the maximum reading on the external surface of the trailer was 0.5 mr/hr which was well within NRC limits. Although the trailer was noted to have been shaken off of its foundation, there was no evidence of contamination or leakage from any of the containers inside the trailer that contained radioactive materials.

The NRC inspectors also visited Building 10, rooms B-26 and B-27, which are the proposed rooms to house the new Nuclear Medicine Facility. The facility was presently used as a weight training facility and should provide adequate support for some of the heavier nuclear medicine equipment. The facility appeared to have adequate space and with some changes to the configuration, should be satisfactory for nuclear medicine. The inspectors confirmed that a license amendment will be required to change the location of nuclear medicine and offered assistance in processing the amendment.

Based on the inspection findings the license is taking appropriate actions to maintain control of their radioactive materials and make preparations for resuming operations. There were no violations of NRC requirements identified during the inspection of the licensee's facilities.

4. Exit Interview

An exit interview was held on February 1, 1994. Personnel present at this meeting are identified in Section 1. During this meeting the licensee was informed there were no violations of NRC requirements. The NRC inspectors also offered their assistance expediting the license amendment for the change in the location of Nuclear Medicine. The NRC inspectors also discussed the importance of documenting surveys of waste being disposed and alerted the licensee of some special precautions for equipment which may contain radioactive materials such as some smoke detectors and some analytical equipment. Because some of these items are

under a general license they may have to be returned to their manufacturer rather than disposed by routine methods. The licensee did not identify as proprietary any of the materials provided to or reviewed by the inspectors during the inspection. Other items discussed at this meeting are described in Section 2 through 4 of this report.