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NRC STAFF PROPOSES \$50,000 FINE FOR APPARENT VIOLATIONS AT WNP-2

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has informed the Washington Public Power Supply System that it proposes to fine the utility \$50,000 for four apparent violations of NRC requirements at the Washington Nuclear Project-2 (WNP-2), near Richland, Washington.

The apparent violations were identified during a routine inspection of the WNP-2 radiation protection program conducted by the NRC on May 22-25. They stem from a radiological event that occurred on May 14 during the removal and transport of highly radioactive filters from the reactor water cleanup system in the reactor building.

The task required continuous oversight by a health physics technician. However, that oversight was interrupted. The health physics technician remained outside an airlock as two other workers transported a barrel of filters on a cart from the reactor building to the radioactive waste building.

While the health physics technician remained outside the airlock, the barrel tipped over as workers attempted to move the cart from the airlock, displacing a lead shielding blanket and exposing two bags containing the highly radioactive filters.

The apparent violations involved the failure to 1) follow WNP-2's radiation work permit procedures to ensure adequate planning and proper instructions to radiation workers and 2) maintain continuous health physics oversight of work activities in a high radiation area. The Supply System has 30 days to respond to the NRC's citation, during which time it may pay the civil penalty or protest it. If the protest is denied, the utility may ask for a hearing.

In a letter informing the Supply System of the proposed penalty, L. Joe Callan, Regional Administrator of NRC Region IV in Arlington, Texas, said, ``[W]ith respect to the collective significance of the violations, the NRC concludes the violations represent a breakdown in the Supply System's implementation of

its RWP (radiation work permit) system in that numerous procedural requirements and good radiation practices were not followed.''

Mr. Callan said that the incident could easily have resulted in far more significant radiation exposures, given the filters' dose rates of 80 rem per hour on contact. The NRC inspectors determined from a review of exposure records that the maximum exposure received by any worker involved in the task was 410 millirem, far below the federal limit of 5,000 millirem, or 5 rem, per year.

Also of concern to the NRC was the fact that workers continued with the task even as their electronic dosimeter alarms sounded to indicate radiation levels in excess of limits set by the licensee for the particular task.

Mr. Callan noted that the proposed civil penalty is the base amount of \$50,000 in recognition of the Supply System's prompt and comprehensive corrective actions taken immediately in response to the incident, as well as corrective actions designed to prevent future such incidents.

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